

Manners and Customs of Bible Lands



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PREFACE

IN THE SPRING of 1951, the author completed a thesis in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree, Master of Arts in Religion, at Pasadena College, California, under the title, "A Study of Manners and Customs of Domestic Life in Palestine as Related to the Scriptures." Desire was expressed by certain members of the faculty that additional material be added to the thesis, and that a general textbook be written on Oriental manners and customs bearing on the Scriptures. As a result of this, the manuscript for this book was completed. Chapters I through XI and XIII through XVII, plus a small portion of Chapter XXVI, are substantially the original thesis, the other chapters having been added.

The author is indebted to Dr. G. Frederick Owen, Professor of Archaeology and Biblical Literature at Pasadena College, for his assistance in the project. Dr. Owen has spent several seasons in Palestine doing research work, and his suggestions and criticisms have been a help to the author in writing. With Dr. Owen's permission, some material derived from class notes in a course taught by him in the summer of 1950 on the subject "Manners and Customs of Bible Lands," was included in the thesis and appears in the present work.

It is hoped that the bibliography in the back of this book will be helpful to all those who desire to make a further study of the subject. Complete information about those books listed in the bibliography appears there, rather than in connection with any mention of them in the reference notes. But where books are referred to in the reference notes and are omitted from the bibliography, the full information about them appears in the reference notes.

Many months of research have been given to the preparation of this manuscript, and yet the result is not to be considered an exhaustive treatise on the subject. But the author will consider himself more than repaid for his efforts if, as a result of reading this book, Bible students will find in it real help in understanding and interpreting the Scriptures.

PERMISSIONS

The author wishes to express his appreciation to the following publishers for their permission to quote from their copyrighted publications. Acknowledgment of the author quoted, and the name of the book and its publisher, are given in the reference notes.

The Warner Press, Anderson, Indiana: Palestine Speaks, by Anis C. Haddad, 1936.

The Jewish Publication Society of America, Philadelphia, Pa.: The Life of the People in Biblical Times, by Max Radin, 1929.

Charles Scribner's Sons, New York, N.Y.: Abraham; Recent Discoveries and Hebrew Origins, by Sir Leonard Woolley, 1936.

INTRODUCTION

THE BIBLE WRITTEN BY ORIENTALS

It is easy for Occidentals to overlook the fact that the Scriptures had their origin in the East, and that each one of the writers was actually an Oriental. Since this is so, in a very real sense the Bible may be said to be an Oriental Book. But many are quite apt to read into the Scriptures Western manners and customs, instead of interpreting them from the Eastern point of view.

Knowing Oriental Manners And Customs Necessary To Understand The Bible

Many passages of Scripture that are hard for the Westerner to understand, are readily explained by a knowledge of the customs and manners of Bible lands. On the other hand, to ignore this subject is to deprive one's self of a thorough mastery of the Bible, both Old and New Testaments.

A Study Of The Manners And Customs Of Arabs Of Bible Lands Invaluable

For many years the Arabs were the custodians of Palestine. In the seventh century, an army of Arabs broke away from Arabia and invaded the Near East. They brought with them the habits of life inherited from countless generations before them. Since they have lived in these lands ever since, they have largely become the conservators of the manners and customs of Bible times.

During The Centuries, Arab Customs Largely Unchanged

There are three classes of Arabs in these lands. First, there is the Nomad or Bedouin Arab, who is a shepherd and lives in tents. Second, there is the Peasant or Fellahin Arab, who is a farmer and usually lives in a village one-room house. Third, there is the City or Belladin Arab, who as a rule engages in business in the larger cities. The Belladin Arab has come in contact with western civilization more than the other classes, and therefore his manner of life has undergone a certain amount of change. On the other hand, the Peasant Arab has changed his customs very little, and the Nomad Arab practically none at all. Through the centuries the Arabs have for the most part considered it to be morally wrong to change their ancient customs. For this reason the manners and customs of Bible-land Arabs are very much the same as the Jews of Bible times. There are some exceptions to this rule, and most of those have to do with religious observances.

Sources Of Material About Manners And Customs Of Bibleland Arabs

For information about the life-habits of the Arabs of the Near East we are indebted to natives of Bible lands, long time residents, missionaries, scholars, and travelers.

What About The Customs Of The Jews Who Have Returned To The New Nation Of Israel?

The customs of the Jews who are now returning from various parts of the world to the land of their fathers, will not be of great value for this study, because they are largely the customs of those lands from whence they have come, and in many cases that means Western customs. There may be a few of the returning Israelites and some of those who have lived long in the land, who have the old-time habits of life, especially religious observances, but those who do are very much in the minority.

Other Sources Of Information About Manners And Customs Of Bible Times

Historians who have written about the time of Christ or of the Apostles have often given information about the manner of living of those days, and of even earlier days. Also the findings of archaeologists have been a valuable source of knowledge on this subject. Things unearthed by the spade, such as pottery, various articles of household furniture, remains of old houses, inscriptions, and the like, often reveal secrets of how men in the long ago lived and acted. Ancient civilizations lost to the world for centuries have been revealed to men by the work of excavators in Bible lands.

CHAPTER I

TENT DWELLINGS

IN THE BIBLE, living in tents is of ancient origin. It goes back before the days of Abraham. The first reference in the Scriptures to tent life is concerning the man Jabal, of whom it is said, "he was the father of such as dwell in tents" ([Gen. 4:20](#)). Following the Flood the Sacred Record says, "God shall enlarge Japheth, and he shall dwell in the tents of Shem" ([Gen. 9:27](#)).

The patriarchs Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob lived most of their lives in tents, in and around the land of Canaan. It was said of Abraham that he "pitched his tent" in the vicinity of Bethel ([Gen. 12:8](#)), that Isaac "pitched his tent in the valley of Gerar" ([Gen. 26:17](#)), and Jacob "Pitched his tent before the city of Shechem" ([Gen. 33:18](#)).

The Children of Israel lived in tents during their forty years in the wilderness. Moses said of them, "The children of Israel shall pitch their tents, every man by his own camp" ([Num. 1:52](#)). And Balaam "lifted up his eyes, and he saw Israel abiding in his tents according to their tribes" ([Num. 24:2](#)).

For many years after the entering of the Promised Land, Israel still lived in tents. In the days of David it was said to the King, "The ark and Israel and Judah, abide in tents" ([2Sam. 11:11](#)), indicating that many of the people at that time were tent-dwellers. Even at the time of the revolt of the ten tribes under Jeroboam and their separation from Judah, the cry went forth, "To your tents, O Israel" ([1Kings 12:16](#)). When the tribes gathered together at such small places as Gilgal, and Shiloh, they undoubtedly brought their tents with them. And after the temple was built at Jerusalem the people would make their pilgrimages there to celebrate the feasts of the Lord, and many thousands of them would sleep in tents on the mountains surrounding the city.

Like the Jews of old, the Nomad or Bedouin Arabs of Palestine, and especially those of Trans-Jordan, have been living in tents for centuries, and their manner of life is strikingly like unto that of the early Bible characters. A study, therefore, of these tent structures of Bible lands of today will throw much light on how the men of early Bible times actually lived. By such a study one can build the proper background for understanding the life and contributions of these men of the long ago.

Tent Material



Bedouin Goat's-Hair Tent

Picture:

Tent Material

The Bedouin's home is his tent, which is made of black goat's hair. He calls it *beit sha'ar*, i.e., "house of hair." It is made of coarse, heavy fabric, and serves to protect the family in winter from the cold winds; in the summer the sides are usually lifted, and the tent serves as a sunshade. This goat's hair cloth that is used in making these tents is porous when it is dry, but becomes waterproof after the first rains have shrunk it together. The Song of Solomon refers to these black goat's hair tents thus: "I am black, but comely, O ye

daughters of Jerusalem, as the tents of Kedar" ([Cant 1:5](#)).

The material that makes up the Bedouin tent is the same as the sackcloth of Bible days. It must be remembered that this Oriental sackcloth is not at all like the Occidental burlap, but is rather a material made of prickly, coarse goat's hair. The Apostle John compares darkness to this sackcloth: "the sun became black like sackcloth of hair" ([Rev. 6:12](#)). In Bible times sackcloth was worn as a sign of sorrow ([Gen. 37:34](#); [2Sam. 3:31](#)), as a sign of humility ([1Kings 21:27](#); [2Kings 19:1](#)), or as a sign of repentance ([Dan. 9:3](#); [Jonah 3:5](#)).

Tent Encampments And Manner Of Setting Up Of Tents

If the Bedouin Arabs live together as a tribe or a clan, as they often do, or if more than one family dwell with each other, then their tents are not pitched in a promiscuous cluster, but more likely in a large circle to make it possible for at least some of their flocks to be protected inside the circle. By the side of the sheik's tent stands a long spear as an emblem of his authority (cf. practice of King Saul in [1Sam. 26:7](#)). His tent is generally larger than the others.

The Bible says that some of the sons of Ishmael lived in tent villages or encampments ([Gen. 25:16](#), A. R. V.). The number of tents that made up the encampment of Abraham must have been large, for in his warfare against the confederacy of kings that took Lot captive, it is stated that he used a band of three hundred eighteen trained soldiers born in his household ([Gen. 14:14](#)). The arrangement of his tents was doubtless much like that of the wealthier Bedouin Arabs of today.

The main overhead portion of the Bedouin's tent is composed of one large awning which is held up by poles, and the ends of the tent cloth are drawn out by cords which are tied to pegs and driven into the ground. It was one of these tent pins that Jael used in killing Sisera ([Judges 4:21](#)).

Inside Arrangement Of Tent

The Oriental tent is usually oblong in shape, and is divided into two, and sometimes three apartments by goat's hair curtains. The entrance leads into the apartment for the men, which also serves as the reception apartment. Beyond this is the apartment for the women and children. And sometimes there is a third apartment for servants or for cattle.

The women in the inner apartment are screened from the view of those in the reception room, but they can hear what goes on in that room. Thus Sarah in her apartment overheard what the angel guest said in the reception apartment of Abraham's tent ([Gen. 18:10-15](#)). In some cases there is a separate tent for the women. It took several tents to care for the large family of Jacob. Reference is made to Jacob's tent, to Leah's tent, to Rachel's tent, and to the tent of the two maid-servants; ([Gen. 31:33](#)).

Inside Furnishings Of Tents

The shepherd's tent is always subject to perpetual removals, as Hezekiah indicated in his song of thanksgiving, after his recovery from sickness ([Isa. 38:12](#)). Therefore, the furnishings of that tent must include only the necessities. Rugs cover the ground, but at night the bedding is brought out, which is composed of mats, or carpets on which to sleep; and their outer garments worn by day become their coverings by night. Sacks of grain are apt to be piled around the middle tent posts. Sure to be about the tent some place are the handmill, and the mortar, in which the grain is pounded. And hanging from the poles will be the skin bags or bottles, for water and other liquids. Also there will be a leathern bucket with which to draw water from any well that may be available, and an earthen pitcher, used by the women to carry the water. Cooking utensils will not be many, but will include pots, kettles, and pans. Serving dishes will include mats, platters, or larger dishes, and there will be cups for drinking. A primitive lamp burning olive oil will illuminate the tent by night. See [Lighting Of The House; Why Exclusion From A Feast Was Considered To Be So Terrible](#). If the family is fortunate enough to have a camel, then the camel furniture will be used for sitting upon inside the tent, as Rachel was doing when her father searched the tents for the lost teraphim ([Gen. 31:34](#)). Also see [The Teraphim](#). Little else than these furnishings would be needed for the simple life of the tent-dwellers.

The hearth is of course upon the ground. A hole is dug in the earth where there is a fire kindled, and several stones are put around it, and the cooking utensils are placed on these and over the fire. One of these hearths is inside the tent, and another one is outdoors, quite likely near to the women's quarters. In the hot weather the cooking is done outside rather than inside the tent.

Patching A Tent And Enlarging The Quarters

New tents are very seldom made among the Bedouins. About the only time this happens is when a young groom and bride set up housekeeping for themselves in a different location from that of the groom's parents, and this rarely happens. The usual procedure is to accumulate the goat clippings of a year or so, and with these make a new strip with which to repair the old tent. The women do this work. The section of the tent roof that is most worn is ripped out, and a new piece of the cloth replaces it. The old piece is then used for a side curtain. Each year new strips of cloth replace old ones and the "house of hair" is handed down from father to son without its being completely new or completely old at any one time.

As the tent-dweller's family grows larger, or as he becomes richer and wishes to enlarge his tent, he does so by simply adding another section to his old tent, very much like the Occidental would build another room on to his house; but there is this difference: instead of building a new tent they just continue patching. Isaiah had this process in mind when he compared the prophetic prosperity of Israel to a Bedouin tent. "Enlarge the place of thy tent, and let them stretch forth the curtains of thine habitations: spare not, lengthen thy cords, and strengthen thy stakes" ([Isa. 54:2](#)).

The Character Of Tent-life

The Westerner does not begin to appreciate the pilgrim character of the Oriental tent-dweller. One traveler among these nomads had this to say about them:

The Arab's tent is his home: yet the word "home" does not mean to him what it means to us. Of our idea of home he has no conception.... His home is the little spot where his tent is pitched and his Rocks are gathered at night. His country-his fatherland-is the limited district over which he roams in summer.

We must always remember that Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob were pilgrims in the Land of Promise. "By faith he became a sojourner in the land of promise, as in a land not his own, dwelling in tents, with Isaac and Jacob, the heirs with him of the same promise" ([Heb. 11:9](#)). And the writer to the Hebrews goes on to say of these patriarchs, "These all died in faith, not having received the promises, but having seen them and greeted them from afar, and having confessed that they were strangers and pilgrims on the earth" ([Heb. 11:13](#), A. R. V.).

Tent-life with its simplicity, and so much of the time spent out-of-doors, has a real charm for those who are used to it. Most of them would not live otherwise if they had the choice to do so. And because the Jewish ancestors were tent-dwellers, their descendants considered such a life in the spirit of true dignity. This explains the numerous references to tent life in sacred poetry and prophecy (cf. [Psa. 84:1-10](#); [Cant. 1:5](#); [Jer. 4:20](#), etc.).

CHAPTER 2

HOUSES OF ONE ROOM

AFTER ISRAEL had been in the land of Canaan many years and had settled down from the nomadic life to the more stable agricultural pursuits, houses began to take the place of tents as places of abode. The average home of the common people was a one-room dwelling. Dr. Thomson thinks that because the poor widow who entertained Elijah had an upper room in her house, it indicates she was not of the poorer class but was in straits only because of the terrible famine (cf. [1Kings 17:8-19](#)).

Purposes Of The House



Peasant's One-Room House

Picture:

Peasant's One-Room House

In Bible times men did not build houses with the idea in mind that most of their daily living would be spent inside them. Their first interest was in spending as much time as possible in God's out-of-doors. The house served as a place of retirement. For this reason the outside walls of the humble house were not inviting. There was no effort to attract attention to this place of retirement.

The purpose of these dwellings is borne out by the meaning of the Hebrew and Arabic words for "house." Rev. Abraham Rihbany, who was born in Syria and spent his early life there, has made a very illuminative statement about the meaning and purpose of the Palestinian house:

The Hebrew word bavith and the Arabic word bait mean primarily a "shelter." The English equivalent is the word "house." The richer term, "home," has never been invented by the son of Palestine because he has always considered himself "a sojourner in the earth." His tent and his little house, therefore, were sufficient for a shelter for him and his dear ones during the earthly pilgrimage.

Because the Palestinians lived out-of-doors so much, the sacred writers were fond of referring to God as a "shelter" or as a "refuge," rather than as a "home." Such expressions in connection with Deity are numerous in the Book of Psalms and also in the prophetic writings. (cf. [Psa. 61:3](#); [Isa. 4:6](#)).

Floor And Walls Of The House

Concerning the nature of the floor of these Oriental houses, Dr. George A. Barton says:

The houses generally had no floor except the earth, which was smoothed off and packed hard. Sometimes this was varied by mixing lime with the mud and letting it harden, and sometimes floors of cobblestones or stone chippings mixed with lime were found. In the Roman period mosaic floors, made by embedding small smoothly cut squares of stone in the earth, were introduced.

The walls of the houses were often made of bricks, but these were not ordinarily burned, but were composed of mud dried in the sun. Job speaks of these kinds of dwelling as "houses of clay" ([Job 4:19](#)). They are similar to the adobe houses so common in Mexico today, and often seen in the Southwestern states of America, where the Spanish influence of the past is still felt.

But sometimes the walls were made of rough sandstones, so common in the land. These were of varying sizes and were set in mud. The joints between them were apt to be wide and irregular. It was only the palaces or houses of the wealthy that were constructed of hewn stones, like the palaces of Solomon ([1Kings 7:9](#)), and the rich of Isaiah's day, who boasted they would replace fallen down brick walls with walls of hewn stones ([Isa. 9:8-10](#)).

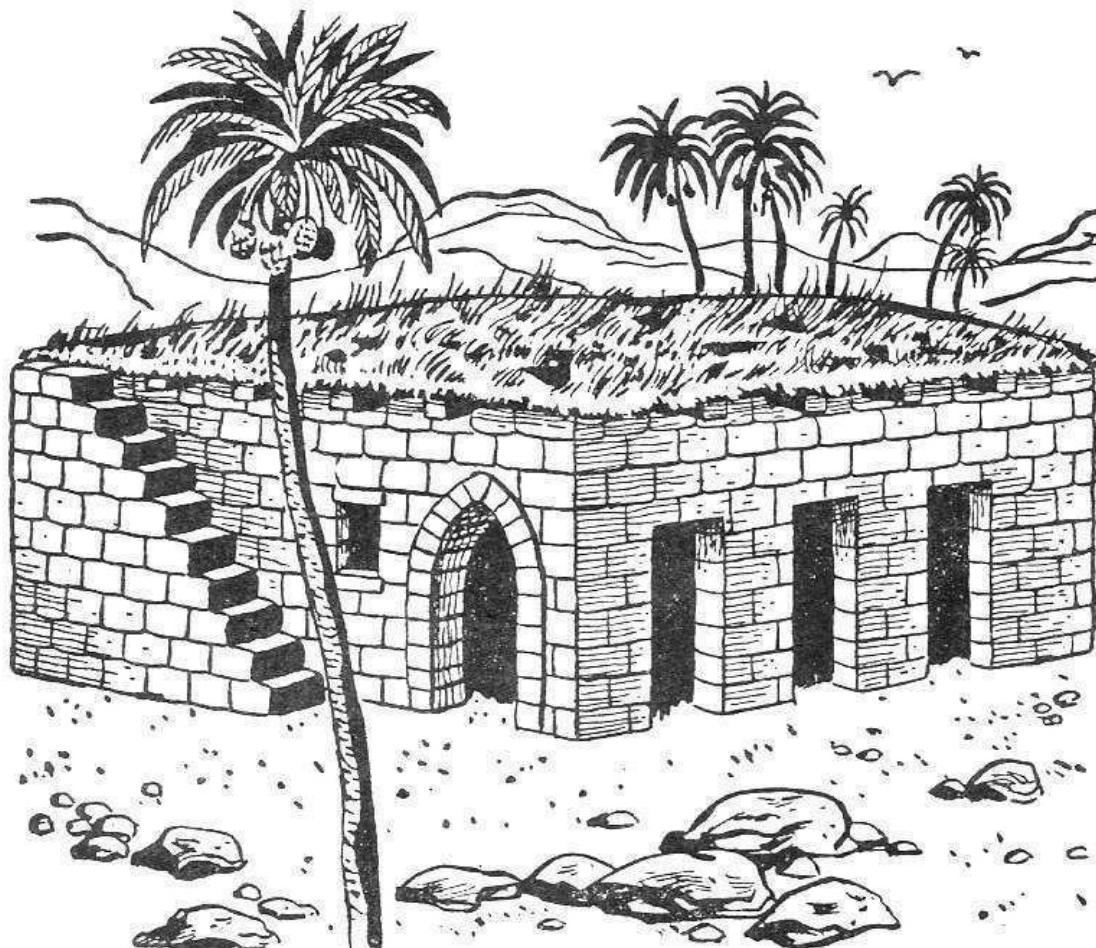
Construction Of The Roof

The roof of these humble Palestinian houses is made by laying beams across from wall to wall, then putting on a mat of reeds, or perhaps thorn bushes, and over it a coating of clay or earth; sand and pebbles are scattered over this, and a stone roller is used to make it smooth and able to shed rain. This roller is usually left on the house top and the roof is rolled again several times, especially after the first rain, in order to keep it from leaking.

A low parapet or wall, with spaces to allow the rain water to flow off, was expected to be built on these houses in Bible times, in order to prevent people from falling off. The failure to build such a wall in modern times has often caused accidents. The law of Moses was very definite in commanding the erection of such. Its regulation says: "When thou buildest a new house, then thou shalt make a battlement for thy roof, that thou bring not blood upon thine house, if any man fall from thence" ([Deut. 22:8](#)). The common use of the houseroof for so many purposes, as shall be seen, made this law essential.

Items Of Interest Growing Out Of The Character Of The Roof An Walls

Grass On The Housetops



Oriental Housetop

Oriental Housetop

Picture:

With the roofs of the houses made largely of dirt or clay, one can easily imagine how grass could grow on the tops of the houses as Bible references indicate.

"Let them be as the grass upon the housetops, which withereth afore it growth up" ([Psa. 129:6](#); [2Kings 19:26](#); [Isa. 37:27](#)). Examples of this in connection with similarly built roofs in modern times have often been seen. One book published in the latter part of the nineteenth century carries a picture of a Palestinian roof all covered with growing grass. The notation beneath the picture says: "This is a good example of the appearance of 'grass on the housetops.' After the winter rains, every flat and mud-roofed building is overgrown with grass and weeds, which soon perish."

Leaky Roofs

With a dirt roof it can be understood how natural it would be for a heavy rainfall to produce a leak, which would make it quite inconvenient for those inhabiting the house at the time. Travelers who stop for the night at one of these dwellings, have sometimes had to change their sleeping quarters, because of the dripping of the rain water. The Book of Proverbs compares this dropping to a contentious woman ([Prov. 19:13](#); [Prov. 27:15](#)).

Digging Through Of Thieves

Since the walls of the houses are so often built of clay or dirt, or of stones with mud between them, it makes it an easy task for a robber to dig through and get into the house Job referred to this: "In the dark they dig through houses" ([Job 24:16](#)). Jesus also spoke of the same thing in His great Sermon on the Mount: "Lay not up for yourselves treasures upon the earth where moth and rust consume, and where thieves dig through and steal" ([Matt. 6:19](#), A.R. V. margin; cf. [Matt. 24:43](#), A. R. V. margin).

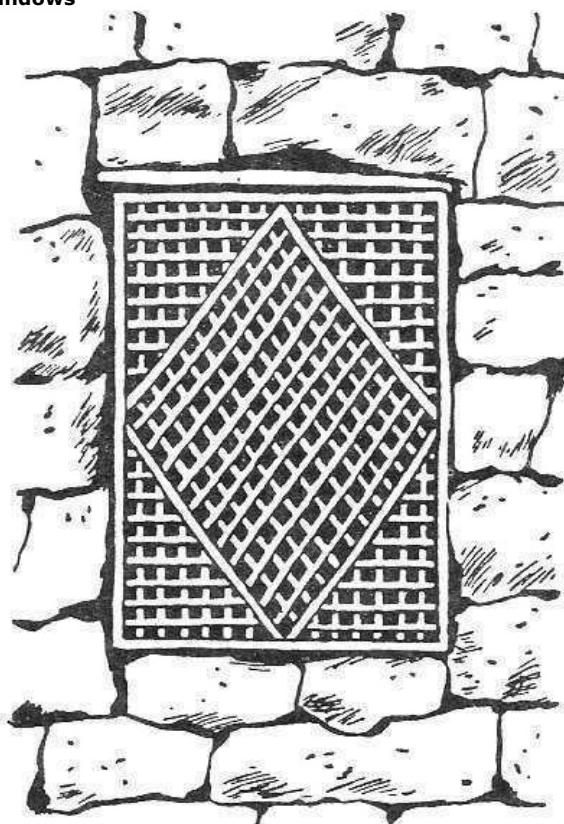
Snakes In House Walls

Because the walls of the, stone houses were built so that the joints between the stones were wide and irregular, therefore a snake might readily crawl into the crevices and unexpectedly come in contact with an inhabitant. Concerning this kind of house the prophet Amos said that a man "leaned his hand on the wall and a serpent bit him" ([Amos 5:19](#)).

Windows.

Windows And Doors

Windows



Latticed Window

Picture: Latticed Window

The Oriental has few windows that open on the street side of the house, and those that do are usually high. As a rule the window has wooden bars serving as a while the lower half of the protection against robbers, while the lower half of the window is screened by a framework of latticework. The Book of Proverbs speaks of such a window: "For at the window of my house I looked forth through my lattice" ([Prov. 7:6](#), A. R. V.). Wooden shutters close the windows at night. When the window is open, those inside may see out without themselves being seen.

Doors.

Doors

The doors as well as windows were ordinarily built of sycamore wood. It was only for ornamental purposes of the wealthy that cedar wood was used (cf. [Isa. 9:10](#)). These doors turned on hinges, as the familiar proverb about the sluggard makes mention of the turning of a door upon its hinges ([Prov. 26:14](#)). If the doors were fastened when shut, bars were usually used for this purpose ([Prov. 18:19](#)).

The door of the peasant's one-room house is opened before sunrise in the morning, and stays open all day long as an invitation to hospitality. The Apocalypse speaks thus: "Behold, I have set before thee an open door" ([Rev. 3:8](#)). For such a door to be shut would indicate the inhabitants had done that of which they were ashamed (cf. [John 3:19](#)). At sunset the door is shut and remains shut during the night (cf. [Luke 11:7](#)). The rule about the open door for the simple house does not hold for the city houses of more than one room. The reference to the Master knocking at the door has to do with such a door ([Rev. 3:20](#); cf. pp. 39, 40). The distinction between the house of the villager and of the city dweller must always be made, in order to understand the scriptural references to houses.

Furnishings Of The House

The furnishings of a one-room Palestinian house were and still are very simple. Mats and cushions are in use to sit on by day, and carpets or mats are slept on at night. There will be vessels of clay for household needs, with perhaps some cooking utensils of metal. There will be a chest for storing bedding, a lamp either placed on a lampstand or a bushel, a broom for house cleaning, and a handmill for grinding the grain, and the goatskin bottles in which liquids are kept. The fireplace would be on the floor often in the middle of the room. This gives a general picture of the furnishings of the average Palestinian home. More details regarding some of these items will be given as the study proceeds.

Sleeping Arrangements

The Parable of the Impudent Friend which Jesus told, if understood in the light of an Oriental one-room house, will give information about sleeping arrangements.

And he said unto them, Which of you shall have a friend, and shall go unto him at midnight, and say unto him, Friend, lend me three loaves; for a friend of mine in his journey is come to me, and I have nothing to set before him? and he from within shall answer and say, Trouble me not: the door is now shut, and my children are with me in bed; I cannot rise and give thee ([Luke 11:5-7](#)).

Among the common folks of the Holy Land individual beds in separate bedrooms have been unknown. Instead the arrangements for sleeping in the parable, and today in Syria and Palestine among the peasants, have been thus described:

The cushion-mattresses are spread side by side in the living room, in a line as long as the members of the family, sleeping close together, require. The father sleeps at one end of the line, and the mother at the other end, "to keep the children from rolling from under the cover." So the man was absolutely truthful when he said by way of excuse, "My children are with me in bed."

Lighting Of The House

Biblical Use Of The Word Candle

The King James Version of the Bible frequently uses the word candle. This is because candles were so widely used at the time this version was made. A literal translation of the original words would use the word lamp or light. Bible characters knew nothing about candles, but were familiar with lamps.

Character Of The Lamp

When the Children of Israel entered the Promised Land they adopted the lamp used by the Canaanites, which was an earthenware saucer to hold the olive oil, and a pinched lip to hold the wick. A thousand years later a Mesopotamian lamp was imported and used in some sections. This lamp had a closed tube for the wick, and thus could be carried about without spilling the oil so readily. In the fifth century B.C. Greek lamps of a beautiful black-glazed variety were imported and became popular. By the third century B.C. the old saucer-type lamp had all but disappeared, but in the second century, the Maccabees revived the use of that type of lamp, as being more in line with the old Jewish traditions. But when the Roman Empire began to dominate the land of Palestine, the lamps in use were either imported, or made under foreign models. The Virgin's Lamp in use in the time of Christ was an improvement over the old saucer type, having sufficient covering to keep the oil from spilling.

The Lampstand

In early Bible times, lampstands were not in common use, and the lamps would be put on a place such as a stone projecting from the wall. In the days of Christ, lampstands were in quite general use. They were tall and were usually placed on the ground. Archaeologists have unearthed some bronze lampstands fourteen inches high that had been used in palaces. They were made for holding bowls or lamps. The poor no doubt had a less expensive type.

If the family had no separate lampstand, the bushel placed on the ground upside down would serve for a lampstand, as well as a table from which the meal would be served. The lamp was to be put on the bushel and not under it ([Matt. 5:15](#)).

The Prophet's Reference To Smoking Flax

Isaiah's prophecy concerning the Messiah was that "the smoking flax shall be not quenched" ([Isa. 42:3](#)). Dr. Thomson tells of seeing ancient clay lamps in use illustrating this text. The wick was often made of a twisted strand of flax, and this was put into the olive oil in the shallow cup of the lamp. When the oil was almost used up it would give forth an offensive smoke. This was an indication it was time to replenish the supply of oil. The implication was that the quenching of the fire was sometimes done purposely. If the wick was well worn, the housewife would quench the fire, and then put a new wick in to take its place. God's servant would not thus treat the poor, weak, and despairing specimens of humanity. He would replenish the oil, trim the wick, and make the dimly burning flame to burn brightly. What a picture this is of our Saviour's desire to help the helpless and lift the fallen and save the lost.

Using The Lamp To Find The Lost Coin

The Saviour's Parable of the Lost Coin ([Luke 15](#)) needs to be understood from the Oriental point of view. Abraham Rihbany as a boy often held an Oriental earthen lamp while his mother hunted for a lost coin or some other object of value. The house had one door and one or two small windows having wooden shutters. For this reason the house was always dimly lighted, and especially so in winter. The mats, cushions, and sheepskins covering the floor would be turned over, and the floor swept. When the lost coin was found, the women neighbors and friends would be called in to rejoice with her, because the loss of a coin would bring down upon the woman the wrath of her husband, and her women neighbors and friends would have a fellow-feeling for her, and would keep what had happened as a secret from the men

folks. Williams translates [Luke 15:9](#): "And when she finds it, she calls in her friends and neighbors." See also [The Difference Between Women's Dress And Men's](#).

The Significance Of Light In A Palestinian House

A lamp is considered to be the Palestinian peasant's one luxury that is a necessity. When the sun sets in the West, the door of his house is shut, and then the lamp is lit. To sleep without a light is considered by most villagers to be a sign of extreme poverty. The Bible makes synonymous such terms as lamp, light, and life. A late traveler looks to see a light in a house, and then he knows there is life there. To wish that a man's light be put out would be to wish him a terrible curse. Concerning the wicked man, Bildad in the Book of Job said: "The light shall be dark in his tabernacle, and his candle [lamp] shall be put out with him" ([Job 18:6](#)). But the psalmist considered himself blessed of the Lord when he said of himself in relation to God, "For thou wilt light my candle [lamp]" ([Psa. 18:28](#)). It was to Orientals who appreciated the value of even a humble earthenware lamp in the dark of night, or even in the obscurity of a darksome house, that Jesus originally said, "Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven" ([Matt. 5:16](#)).

Cooking Arrangements

The Stove Or Fireplace

Like the Nomads who live in tents, the peasants who live in one-room houses, carry on as much of their meal-cooking outside as the weather will permit. These operations are transferred inside only when the cold winter weather makes it desirable. The Occidental would hardly call what they use in cooking their meals either a stove or a fireplace, but it serves the purpose. Often the place for the fire is on the floor in the middle of the room. A small open clay-baked box, or else a thick jar with holes at the sides, is what usually serves as a stove.

The Fuel Used

The peasant often uses dried dung as fuel for his fire. Some of the poorer classes use this themselves, and sell the sticks they find to those who can afford to buy them. A reference in the prophecy of Ezekiel indicates this use of fuel was common in Bible times ([Ezek. 4:15](#)).

In the Orient fuel is usually so scarce that dried grass and withered flowers are apt to be carefully gathered into bundles and used for making a fire. There are Bible indications that this was often done in those days of old. Jesus said: "The grass of the field, which today is, and tomorrow is cast into the oven" ([Matt. 6:30](#); [Luke 12:28](#)).

Another popular fuel for fires in Palestine is thorns. There are many kinds of thorny shrubs that grow there, and the people gather them and make good use of them. Bible passages indicating such use of them are numerous ([2Sam. 23:6, 7](#); [Psa. 118:12](#); [Eccles. 7:6](#); [Isa. 9:18](#); [Isa. 10:7](#); [Isa. 33:12](#); [Nahum 1:10](#)).

The widow of Zarephath was gathering sticks to build a fire ([1Kings 17:10](#)), but the fire built in the courtyard of the high priest's house, where Simon Peter warmed himself, was built of charcoal ([John 18:18](#), Williams). Jesus cooked breakfast for His disciples on a charcoal fire ([John 21:9](#), Williams).

The Chimney

The Fellahin Arabs have various ways of taking care of smoke from the interior fires. Sometimes they have an opening in the ceiling that serves as a chimney, or an aperture in the side of the house will serve the purpose. Often, when the fireplace is in the corner of the room, there is a hood over it with an outlet for the smoke. Frequently, charcoal fires are started in a brazier outdoors, and when most of the smoking is over, and the coals are red hot, then it is taken indoors.

The prophet Hosea refers to "smoke out of the chimney" ([Hosea 13:3](#)). Some translators render it, "smoke out of the window." A high latticed opening in the wall of the house would serve both as window and chimney in certain of the peasant homes. But no doubt, most of the chimney arrangements used by the Arabs as mentioned above, were also in use in Bible times. The Psalmist's comparison of himself with "a bottle in the smoke" ([Psa. 119:83](#)), could be an indoor figure; other scriptural references to smoke, that are often spoken of as being, indoors, could just as well be outdoors ([Prov. 10:26](#); [Isa. 65:5](#), etc.). It can safely be assumed that Bible houses were not always as full of smoke as many have assumed to be the case.

Kindling A Flame

The method used in early Old Testament times to produce a fire was to make sparks by the striking of stone and flint, or by the friction of pieces of wood, afterwards igniting a blaze. There are indications that Israel in later times produced fire by striking steel against flint. In [Isaiah 50:11](#), where it speaks of kindling a fire, the Hebrew word translated "kindle" means "to strike," and evidently refers to the striking of flint on steel.

Uses Made Of The Roof Of The House

The roof of an Oriental house is used today for a great variety of purposes, much like it was used in the days of the prophets and of the apostles.

Used As A Place To Sleep

The roof is a popular place for the Oriental to sleep.

For a great part of the year the roof, or "housetop," is the most agreeable place about the house, especially in the morning and evening. There many sleep during the summer, both in the city and the country, and in all places where malaria does not render it dangerous. The custom is very ancient.

An example in the Bible of this practice, is the incident of Samuel calling Saul, who had slept on the house-top ([1Sam. 9:26](#), A. R. V.).

Used As A Place For Storage

The flat Oriental roofs so exposed to the air and sunshine are well suited for storing grain or fruit to be ripened or dried. This custom is a common one in the East. Rahab hid the spies with the stalks of flax which she had on her roof ([Josh. 2:6](#)).

Used As A Gathering Place In Times Of Excitement

In [Isaiah 22:1](#) the prophet says: "What aileth thee now, that thou art wholly gone up to the housetops?" Thus is described a typical Oriental city in the midst of a time of great commotion, just as the Westerner at such a time gathers in the streets, so the Easterner goes to the housetops, where he can see down the streets, and discover what is happening.

Used As A Place For Public Proclamations

In the days of Jesus as well as in modern times the villages of the Holy Land have had town criers. The orders of local governors are thus proclaimed from the top of the highest house available. Such a proclamation is usually made in the evening, after the men have returned from their work in the field. The long drawn-out call becomes familiar to the residents, and they learn to listen for what follows.

The call of the town crier is said to resemble a distant, prolonged railroad whistle. Jesus must have often heard the call of the town crier. To his disciples he said: "What ye hear in the ear, proclaim upon the housetops" ([Matt. 10:27](#), A. R. V.). As a warning against the impossibility of hiding our sins in the day of judgment, he said, "That which ye have spoken in the ear in closets shall be proclaimed upon the housetops" ([Luke 12:3](#)).

Used As A Place Of Worship And Prayer

The Scriptures indicate that roofs of houses were used for true worship of God, and also for idolatrous worship. The prophet Zephaniah speaks of "them that worship the host of heaven upon the housetops" ([Zeph. 1:5](#)). And Luke tells us that Peter at Joppa "went up upon the housetop to pray about the sixth hour" ([Acts 10:9](#)). It would be natural for those worshiping the heavenly bodies to do so on the roof, and no doubt Peter retired to the housetop where he could be alone with God.

Used As A Way Of Escape In Time Of Evil

In a day when escape from evil was necessary, the inhabitants of villages in Christ's time could do so by going from roof to roof, because the houses were located so close to each other. Dr. Edersheim describes the situation thus:

From roof to roof there might be regular communication, called by the Rabbis "the road of the roofs." Thus a person could make his escape, passing from roof to roof, till at the last house he would descend the stairs that led down its outside, without having entered any dwelling. To this "road of the roofs" our Lord no doubt referred in His warning to His followers ([Matt. 24:17](#); [Mark 13:15](#); [Luke 17:31](#)), intended to apply to the last siege of Jerusalem, "And let him that is on the housetop not go down into the house, neither enter therein."

Bethlehem House And Manger

The humble scene of the birthplace of the Baby Jesus is so often interpreted with Occidental instead of Oriental flavor that it would be well for Westerners to have the description of the kind of a Bethlehem house in which the Saviour was doubtless born, as given by John D. Whiting. Entering the door of this one-room Bethlehem dwelling one sees that two-thirds of the space is given over to a "raised masonry platform, some eight to ten feet above the ground and supported by low-domed arches." This space that is raised is occupied by the members of the family, and the lower part of the house is for the cattle and flocks. Narrow stone steps lead up to where the family lives, and there are only two small windows in the room and these are high up from the ground. In winter weather the sheep and goats are kept inside the house, also a few work cattle, and perhaps a donkey. Primitive mangers for the cattle are to be seen around the walls, and these are "built of rough slabs of stone placed on edge and plastered up with mortar." The owner of the animals often sleeps on a small raised place, where he can keep watch over newly born lambs.

To know the heart of the land, to have learned the hospitality of its people, which is always offered, no matter how primitive or simple, makes it easy to picture Mary and Joseph returning from the inn, already filled with guests, and turning aside into a home such as we have described, the regular dwelling portion of which may have been none too large for the family which occupied it. It may have been crowded with other guests, but they find a welcome and a resting-place for the babe in a manger .

CHAPTER 3

HOUSES OF MORE THAN ONE ROOM

AMONG THE ARABS of Palestine villages and towns, houses of more than one room are owned by those who are more or less prosperous. The Arabic word meaning "house" also means "a room." The same thing was true of the houses belonging to the ancient Hebrews. As a rule the houses of one room were in the villages, and those of more than one room were in the cities.

Building A House Of Two, Three, Or More Rooms

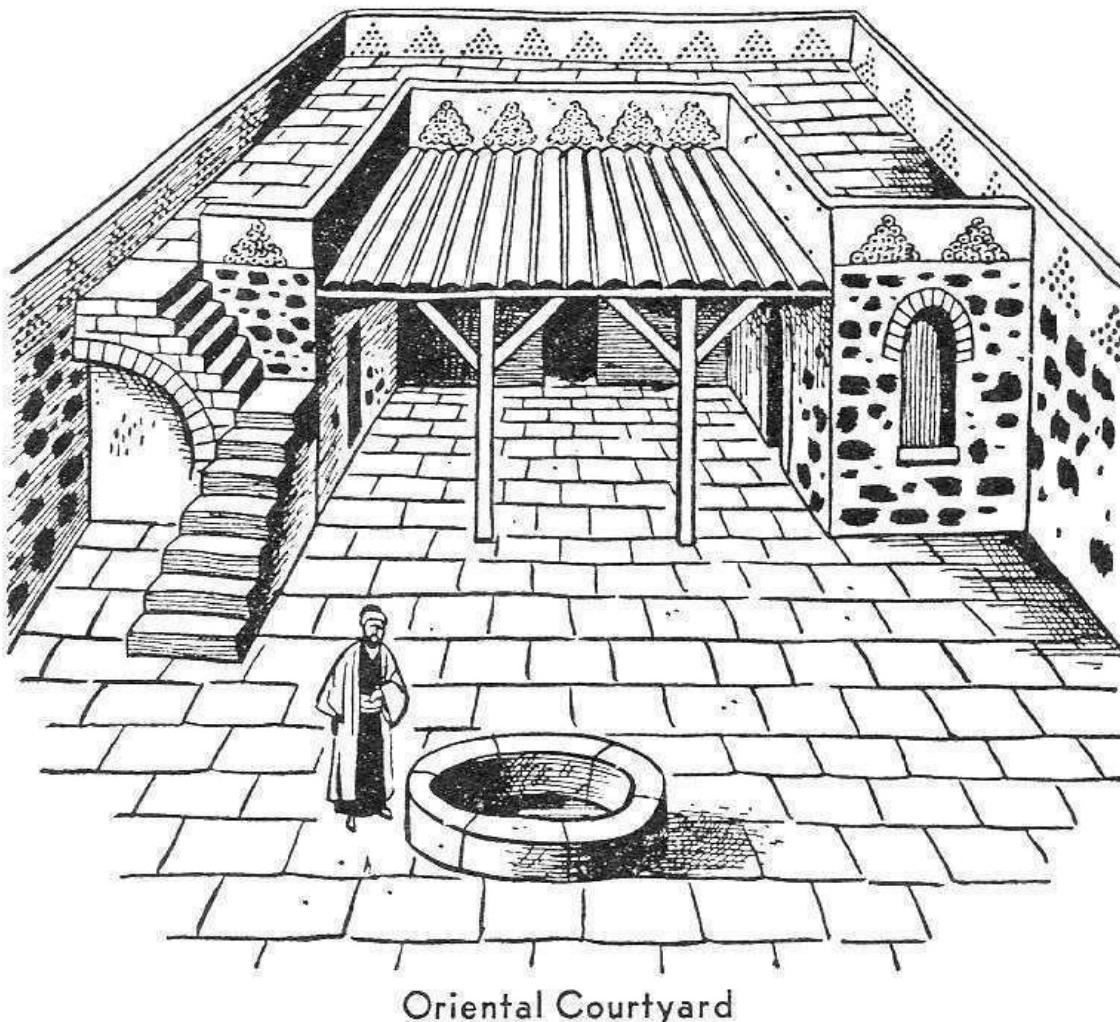
If a house of two rooms is to be built, the Oriental does not place them side by side, as the Occidental builder would do. Rather the breadth of a room is left between the two rooms, and a wall is constructed between the ends, and as a result of this arrangement, the house has an open court. If the builder expects to have three rooms, then a room would be substituted for the wall at the end of the court, and there would be three rooms around a courtyard. If there are to be more than three rooms in the house, the additional rooms are added to those at the side, making the court of greater length.

The Appearance And Arrangement Of Rooms

There is a great difference between an Oriental and Occidental house of more than one room. The exterior of the Occidental house is made to be as beautiful as possible, and especially the part that fronts on the street. But the exterior of the Oriental house presents an appearance that is mean and blank by comparison. The Oriental house fronts inwardly toward the court, rather than outwardly toward the street, as does the Occidental house. The general plan of the Oriental house is a series of rooms built around an open courtyard. The reason for this arrangement is that seclusion is the chief thought in mind.

The Oriental Courtyard

Open To The Sky



Oriental Courtyard

Picture:

It is important for the Westerner to realize that at the center of the Oriental house of several rooms is a courtyard that is open to the sky. The courtyard is an important part of the house. A person can be in the court and thus in the house, and yet he would be outdoors

from the point of view of the Westerner. As an example, [Matthew 26:69](#) says: "Now Peter sat without in the palace." Now this simply means that Peter was outside the rooms of the palace, and yet he was in the open courtyard, located in the central portion of the building. Although the court is open to the air above, at times an awning is drawn over a portion of it. And some houses have a gallery around the sides of the court.

Often Planted With Trees, Shrubs, Or Flowers

These Oriental courtyards are often made beautiful by the presence of trees, shrubs, or various flowers . The Psalmist refers to such a practice with the familiar words: "I am like a green olive tree in the house of God" ([Psa. 52:8](#)). And again he said: "Those that be planted in the house of the Lord shall flourish in the courts of our God" ([Psa. 92:13](#)). He is illustrating divine truth by referring to trees so often planted in courtyards of houses. Actually trees were never planted in the Temple courts.

Cisterns Often Built In Courts

The interesting Story of two men in the days of David who hid from Absalom is told in [2Sam. 17:18, 19](#). "But they went both of them away quickly, and came to a man's house in Bahurim, which had a well in his court; whither they went down. And the woman took and spread a covering over the well's mouth, and spread ground corn thereon: and the thing was not known." The "well" mentioned here was actually a "cisten" which is often dug in Oriental courtyards in order to catch the rain water. When these cisterns are dry, they make good places for fugitives to hide. Because the mouth of these cisterns is at the level of the ground, it makes it easy to cover it over with some article, and then spread grain over that, and thus the place of hiding can be kept secret.

Fires Often Kindled In Courts In Cold Weather

This practice is illustrated in Simon Peter's experience of denying Jesus. A fire was built in the courtyard of the high priest's house where Jesus was being tried. [John 18:18](#) says: "And the servants and officers stood there, who had made a fire of coals; for it was cold: and they warmed themselves: and Peter stood with them, and warmed himself."

Courtyard As A Bathing-place

When the Scripture says that David from his palace roof saw the beautiful Bathsheba bathing ([2Sam. 11:2](#)), it needs to be understood, that she was in the courtyard on the inside of her house, not visible to ordinary observation, yet the king from his palace roof saw her and was tempted to sin.

Meals Often Eaten In The Courtyard

Today, as in the days of Jesus, meals are often eaten in the interior court of the Oriental house. No doubt Jesus was entertained at meals which were served in the open court of his host's house.

The Door And The Porch

Location And Appearance Of The Door

The door or gate was located in the middle of the front side of the house. This entrance was usually so arranged that nobody could see into it from the street. Sometimes a wall was built in front of it to serve this purpose.

Oriental gates, or large doors often have small doors like a panel within them. The small door is in use for ordinary occasions, and the large gate or door is opened only on extraordinary occasions. [Acts 12:13](#) speaks of Peter knocking "at the door of the gate," which doubtless means the smaller door within the larger gate.

The Use Of Keys

The Oriental key of modern times is like the key of Isaiah's days, and most certainly not like the small occidental variety. [Isaiah 22:22](#) says: "The key of the house of David will I lay upon his shoulder." Dr. Thomson tells of seeing different keys in Palestine that would be large enough to lay on the shoulder of a man. He saw one key about a foot and a half in length. The keys were usually made of wood. The lock is placed on the inside of the gate or door, and to make it possible for the owner of the house to unlock it, a hole is cut in the door, and he thrusts his arm through this hole, and then inserts the key. In Song of Solomon [5:4](#), the bride says: "My beloved put in his hand by the hole of the door." She saw him thrust his hand through the hole, that he might unlock the door and then go in.

The Porch And Duties Of The Porter

The passageway inside the door and leading to the courtyard itself is called the porch. It is most often furnished with some kind of seats for the porter or for the servants. It was in this porch that one of Peter's denials took place. "And when he was gone out into the porch, another maid saw him, and said unto them that were there, This fellow was also with Jesus of Nazareth" ([Matt. 26:71](#); [Mark 14:68](#)).

It is the duty of the porter (or servant or member of the family serving in that capacity) to parley with any visitor who knocks on the door desiring admission, The purpose of this is to give opportunity to recognize the *voice* of the visitor, and identify him as a friend. So it is not expected that the door will be opened as soon as the knock is heard. The one inside will call out, "Who?" And the outsider, instead of giving his name, will rather answer, "I." [Acts 12:13, 14](#) says: "And as Peter knocked at the door of the gate, a damsel came to hearken, named Rhoda. And when she knew Peter's voice, she opened not the gate for gladness." When Rhoda had listened to Peter's voice then she recognized who it was outside the gate. The familiar words of [Revelation 3:20](#) present the same idea: "Behold, I stand at the door and knock: if any man hear any *voice*, and open the door, I will come into him," (for additional light on [Rev. 3:20](#), note Williams' translation of the word "guest" and then study the relation between host and guest as given in Chapter VII of this book). We must recognize the *voice* of the Saviour who is knocking. When Jesus came walking on the water to the fearful disciples in the storm, He did not say: "It is Jesus, be not afraid," but rather, "It is I; be not afraid" ([Matt. 14:27](#); [Mark 6:50](#); [John 6:20](#)). They heard His voice and recognized that it was the voice of Jesus. The Oriental is trained to listen to a voice and be able to recognize a friend.

The Upper Room

The upper room or chamber is a well-known part of many Oriental houses today, and is frequently referred to in the Bible (cf. [2Kings 1:2](#); [2Kings 23:12](#); [Acts 9:37](#); [2Acts 20:8](#), etc.). Those who cannot afford such a room are content with booths or arbors on the roof of their houses. But when it is possible to do so they construct a room. It provides a place of coolness in the hot weather, a place of retreat, and a distinguished guest is given accommodations there. If more than one room is built on the roof, it is called a summer house, in

contrast with the winter house which is downstairs.

The most famous upper room of Old Testament times was the prophet's chamber built for Elisha, that he might have a place of retirement suited to a man of prayer. There was doubtless an outside stairway leading to it, so that the prophet might come and go without disturbing the people in the house. The furnishings of the room included a bed, a table, a stool and a lampstand ([2Kings 4:10](#)).

In the New Testament there are several notable uses of the upper room. Jesus sent two disciples to secure the use of a guest chamber for the Passover meal. A large upper room was put at their disposal. With thousands of Jews from all over Palestine in Jerusalem to celebrate the feast, it was expected that anybody having such a room would gladly let it be used for that purpose. ([Mark 14:12-16](#); [Luke 22:7-13](#).) And then the prayer meeting that preceded Pentecost was held in an upper room ([Acts 1:13](#)). The Revisers translate it "the upper room" rather than "an upper room." Perhaps it was the same room where Jesus had celebrated the Passover with them. At any rate, it had come to be their fixed place for meeting. Weymouth's translation reads: "They went up to the upper room which was now their fixed place for meeting." Upon the death of Dorcas, Luke says her body was washed and placed in an upper chamber, according to the custom of those times. The miracle of her being raised from the dead followed Peter's going up into that upper room ([Acts 9:36-41](#)).

Letting The Sick Man Through The Roof To Jesus

A knowledge of the Oriental house is necessary in order to understand the story of the palsied man, who was let down through a hole in the roof, in order to get him to Jesus to be healed. Mark and Luke both give this aspect of the story. Mark says: "They uncovered the roof where he was: and when they had broken it up, they let down the bed" ([Mark 2:4](#)). Luke puts it this way: "And let him down through the tiling with his couch into the midst before Jesus" ([Luke 5:19](#)). These accounts present some difficulties, and several interpretations have been offered in solving them. The two most plausible ones will be given here.

The simplest explanation is that advocated by Dr. Thomson. He suggests that the sticks, thorn-bush, mortar, and earth of the roof were broken up, and thrown aside sufficiently, to let the sick man down into the house. He says that this could be done and the place could be repaired easily. Often this very thing is done in order to let grain, or straw or other things through. He testifies to having seen it done himself. The one difficulty about such a process, with the crowd below, would be the amount of dust caused.

It would seem that Luke's account mentioning the letting down of the man through the *tiling* presents a difficulty to this interpretation. But some have considered "the tiling" to be a reference to the ordinarily constructed roof in the Orient.

The Greek word for "tiling" means, "pottery ware," and such a word could describe a dirt roof when rolled and allowed to harden into clay.

Other teachers of the Word have a different idea of what was done with the man. Advocating this view, Dr. Edersheim has this to say:

It is scarcely possible to imagine that the bearers of the paralytic would have attempted to dig through this into a room below, not to speak of the interruption and inconvenience caused to those below such an operation. But no such objection attaches if we regard it not as the main roof of the house, but as that of the covered gallery under which we are supposing the Lord to have, stood . . . In such case it would have been comparatively easy to "unroof" the covering of "tiles"; and then "having dug out" an opening through the lighter framework which supported the tiles, to let down their burden "into the midst before Jesus."

In this connection Edersheim indicates that there were outside as well as inside stairways leading up to the roof.

More Elaborate Furnishings

The simple furnishings of a one-room house, where the common people lived, have already been described. Houses of more than one room were inhabited by those in a better situation. The wealthy usually had upper rooms as well as lower rooms, and of course, the furnishings were more elaborate. The divan or raised seat was located around the borders of the room. The rich adorned these and floored them. They were used for seats during the daytime, and beds were put on them at night. Amos speaks of the luxury of ivory beds in his day ([Amos 6:4](#)). The bed customarily in use was a mattress and pillow that could be placed where desired. In wealthy homes, carpets, curtains, and awnings were present in abundance. The Oriental custom was to sit on the divan with the lower limbs of the body crossed.

CHAPTER 4

FOODS AND THEIR PREPARATION FOR EATING

WHAT KINDS OF FOOD did the ancient Jews eat? "The ordinary food of the average Hebrew of Bible times was bread, olives, oil, buttermilk cheese from their flocks; fruits and vegetables from the orchards and gardens; and meat on rare occasions." Only few more varieties would have to be added to make this a complete list of foods eaten in those days.

The Use Of Raw Grain And Parched Grain

The eating of

quite pliable, and the men fold it up and put it in their scrip, and take it with them, so they can eat it as needed

Baking Of Bread



Bread-Baking

Picture:

Bread-Baking

The most primitive method of baking bread was the laying of cakes of dough on heated stones. A Scriptural example of this is from the experience of Elijah. ([1 Kings 19:6](#), A. R. V. margin): "There was at his head a cake baken on hot stones."

Another simple method of baking is the digging in the ground of a hole four or five feet deep, and three feet in diameter, and after this oven is heated, the dough is rolled out until it is no thicker than a person's finger, and then it is struck against the oven's sides where it instantly bakes.

Sometimes a great stone pitcher is used as an oven. In the bottom of it a fire is made among small flints that retain the heat. The dough is placed on these and is quickly baked. Sometimes the dough is rolled out quite thin and is stuck on the outside of the hot pitcher where it bakes. Some have thought that it was this pitcher-oven that was meant in [Lev. 2:4](#), where two types of unleavened bread were to be baked. The cakes of fine flour would be baked inside the pitcher-oven, and the wafers would be baked on the outside of it.

Another type of simple oven is a large earthenware jar, into which the fuel is placed, and when the jar is hot enough the thin cakes are laid on the outside to cook.

When bread was baked individually by each family in Bible days, some such method as has been described was probably used by the ordinary homes.

But often today, as in the days of Sacred Writ, bread was and is baked in either a semipublic oven, or in the oven of a public baker. Sometimes each town might have several of these ovens. One type of such an oven consists of a big earthen tube, some three feet in diameter, and about five feet long. It is sunk in the ground inside a hut. The women take their turn in baking their bread. The fuel is thrown into the tube, and when the fire gets hot, and billows of smoke and tongues of flame come from the deep hole, the hut, without any chimney in it, begins to resemble an active crater. Malachi must have seen such an oven when he wrote the words, "For behold, the day cometh, that shall burn as an oven: and all the proud, yea, and all that do wickedly, shall be stubble" ([Mal. 4:1](#)). Another type of

Oriental oven "is a long, low, stonebuilt vault, like half a railway-engine's boiler, with a stone pavement down the middle, and a long narrow strip at each side for the firewood." Each night the ashes are taken out, and often the children of poor families will bring a piece of tin, or of a broken water jar, and carry home on this some of the embers of the fire with which to start the fire at home for the evening meal. Hosea makes mention of "an oven heated by the baker" ([Hosea 7:4](#)). This would indicate that some of the people brought their bread to a baker to do the baking. The city of Jerusalem had its Baker's Street in the time of Jeremiah ([Jer. 37:21](#)).

Vegetables

The two most widely used vegetables in Bible times were *beans* and *lentils*. The prophecy of Ezekiel mentions both of these in one verse ([Ezek. 4:9](#)). Beans are included in the articles of food which David's friends brought to him when he was in flight from Jerusalem, because of Absalom's rebellion ([2Sam. 17:28](#)). The most famous Biblical use of lentils, was of course, the selling of Esau's birthright for a meal including lentils with bread ([Gen. 25:33, 34](#), A. R. V.).

Thomson tells of being invited to a meal of lentils which he found to be very savory with its "appetizing fragrance and substantial taste, that to a hungry man must have been very tempting. In eating this dish, he did as his hosts did, doubled "some of their bread spoon-fashion," and then dipped it into the saucepan. He suggests that Esau no doubt used the same kind of spoon of bread in eating the pottage of lentils.

The Israelites' Egyptian diet included the vegetables: leeks, onions, and garlic ([Num. 11:5](#)). Most of these were probably used sometimes in Palestine. The prophet Isaiah mentions a "garden of cucumbers" ([Isa. 1:8](#)). Gourds were also used, as suggested by two Scripture passages ([Jonah 4:6-10](#); [2Kings 4:39](#)). The "pulse" which Daniel and his companions wanted as their diet, when they were captives, was probably vegetables ([Dan. 1:12](#)). The word means primarily, "something sown," and therefore would include edible seeds that are cooked, such as lentils, beans, peas, etc. It was a simple vegetable diet that was wanted instead of the rich, unwholesome food of the king's table.

Milk.

Dairy Products

Milk

Milk in Bible times was considered, not simply as something that was added to their food in cooking, but was regarded as a substantial food for all ages. Babies were fed mother's milk ([Isa. 28:9](#)). The Hebrews not only used cow's milk, but also sheep's milk ([Deut. 32:14](#)), goat's milk ([Prov. 27:27](#)), and, no doubt, camel's milk ([Gen. 32:15](#)). The Promised Land was often called "a land flowing with milk and honey" ([Exod. 3:8](#); [Exod. 13:5](#); [Josh. 5:6](#); [Jer. 11:5](#)). This would indicate that Palestine's broad pasture lands would produce an abundance of milk.

A form of milk that is in common use among the Arabs today is called by them "leben," which means, "white." It is like our sour milk curds. In order to make it, they pour milk in a dish and then put yeast in it, which starts it to working. They cover it over with a warm cloth, and after it sets for about a day it is ready to serve. The Arabs are very fond of it. They say of it, "It makes a sick man well." If they have money for only one dish, they would usually ask for leben. It was probably this "leben" that Abraham gave to his guests ([Gen. 18:8](#)), and also that Jael gave to Sisera ([Judges 4:19](#); [Judges 5:25](#)).

Butter.

Butter

It is generally agreed among Bible scholars, that in most of the cases where the word "butter" appears in our generally used translation, it does not mean the kind of butter known by the Westerner, but rather curdled milk or "leben." There are two passages that do refer to *butter*, but even that is in a different form from that used by those people who live outside the Orient. The first passage mentions "butter of kine" ([Deut. 32:14](#)), and the second refers to the process of making butter, "the churning of milk bringeth forth butter" ([Prov. 30:33](#)). The Bible-time method of making butter was doubtless the same as used by the Arab Bedouins of today. Thomson describes the process and the resulting butter thus:

What are those women kneading and shaking so zealously in that large black bag suspended from that tripod? That is a bottle not a bag, made by stripping off the skin of a young buffalo. It is full of milk and that is their method of churning. When the butter has come they take it out, and boil it, and then put it in bottles made of goatskins. In winter it resembles candied honey, in summer it is like oil. That is the only kind of butter they have in this country.

Concerning the passage in Proverbs ([Prov. 30:33](#)), "Surely the churning of milk bringeth forth butter, and the wringing of the nose bringeth forth blood," Thomson calls attention to the fact, that the word *churning*, and the word for *wringing* are the same word in the Hebrew. He says:

It is the wringing of milk that bringeth forth butter, just as these women are squeezing and wringing the milk in that skin bottle. There is no analogy between our mode of churning, and pulling a man's nose until the blood comes, but in this native operation the comparison is quite natural and emphatic.

Buttermilk

Buttermilk is not itself mentioned in the Bible, but it was without doubt used, because the process of churning, as has already been referred to, is mentioned.

Cheese.

Cheese

In Palestine the Arabs are fond of cheese. It is convenient for them to take cheese along with them. Their cheese is somewhat like Western slices, only larger and thicker. They are about as thick as a man's hand. They are found stacked up in the markets. David's father gave him ten cheeses to take to the army captain ([1Sam. 17:18](#)). Also Barzillai brought cheese to King David ([2Sam. 17:29](#)).

Meat

When Meat Was Eaten And What Kinds

As a rule, Bible characters, like Orientals in modern times, have not eaten meat, except on special occasions. When a stranger or guest was entertained, or when a feast was made, then meat would be served. Kings and other wealthy men had meat often. The daily provision of meat for King Solomon's court is given in Scripture. Four kinds of meat for the king's daily menu are mentioned: beef, mutton, game, and fowl ([1Kings 4:23](#)). Abraham served veal to his guests ([Gen. 18:7](#)). Gideon's guest was provided with a kid ([Judges 6:19](#)). On the shores of the Sea of Galilee, fish was a common article of food in the days of Jesus. Christ referred to this when he spoke of a son begging his father for a fish ([Luke 11:11](#)). This Scripture might imply that these dwellers near the lake lived mostly on fish.

How Meat Was Cooked And Served

The method of preparing meat has thus been described:

Roasting on a spit was perhaps the oldest way of cooking flesh, but less common among the Israelites than boiling, roast flesh being used as a rule only by the rich and better classes, as is still the case in the East.

The servants of Eli's sons said to those bringing offerings, "Give flesh to roast for the priest; for he will not have boiled flesh of thee" ([1Sam. 2:15](#), A. R. V.). After the meat was cooked it was divided up into small pieces, and a broth was prepared to serve with it, and this would often have vegetables in it. Such a broth was used in the days of Gideon and of Isaiah ([Judges 6:19, 20](#); [Isa. 54:4](#)).

Eggs

Sometime between the days of Elijah and the time of Christ, the domestic fowl and the everyday use of eggs was introduced into Palestine. There would seem to be one early Old Testament reference to what might be the egg of a hen. It is [Job 6:6](#): "Is there any taste in the white of an egg?" But the marginal rendering of the American Revised text translates it: "Is there any taste in the juice of purslain?" It is doubtful if an egg is meant here. But we do know that the use of eggs, among the Galileans around the lake, was common in Christ's time, for Jesus speaks of a son asking for an egg from his father ([Luke 11:12](#)).

Honey

God had promised Israel, "a land flowing with milk and honey" ([Exod. 3:8](#); [Exod. 13:5](#); [Josh. 5:6](#); [Jer. 11:5](#)). The numerous references to honey or honeycomb in God's Word, are proof that Palestine abounded with the product of the bees. Without doubt, the Jews took care of bees in order to produce honey. However, many of the Scriptural citations indicate that wild honey was very common. The favorite haunts of the bees were in the cavities of trees, where Jonathan discovered and ate some of the honey ([1Sam. 14:25-27](#)); in the holes of the rock, where it was often extracted ([Psa. 81:16](#)); and sometimes the dried carcasses of animals, as when Samson ate honey from the carcass of the lion he had slain ([Judges 14:8, 9](#)).

The poetical books of the Hebrew Bible abound with comparisons to honey. The judgments of God's Word are compared to it ([Psa. 19:10](#)). Pleasant words are likened unto it ([Prov. 16:24](#)), as also knowledge and wisdom to the soul ([Prov. 24:13, 14](#)). And the bride and bridegroom of Solomon's Song speak of honey ([Cant. 4:11](#); [Cant. 5:1](#)).

In New Testament times John the Baptist lived on locusts and wild honey from the wilderness ([Matt. 3:4](#)). And when Jesus wanted to prove to the disciples that His resurrection body was a real body, He asked for food and was given a piece of broiled fish with some honeycomb ([Luke 24:41-43](#)).

Dr. Thomson relates how "in the clefts of a precipice overhanging Wady el Kurn swarms of bees made their home." A man was let down over the rock by ropes, and being protected from assault from the bees, he was able to extract a large quantity of honey. Such an incident is reminiscent of the expression of Moses in his farewell song: "He made him to suck honey out of the rock" ([Deut. 32:13](#)).

Fruit

Olives And Olive Oil

Some use is made of the pickled berry of the olive, but the bulk of the fruit is used to make oil. In the Orient, olive oil usually takes the place of butter, and is largely used in cooking meals. A survey of several Scriptures will indicate how important a food olive oil was considered to be. The widow who fed Elijah said to him: "I have not a cake, but an handful of meal in a barrel, and a little oil in a cruse" ([1Kings 17:12](#)). She had been depending largely on bread and oil for her food, but the supply of both was about gone. The miracle of Elijah was the multiplication of that supply, "And the barrel of meal wasted not, neither did the cruse of oil fail, according to the word of the Lord, which he spake by Elijah" ([1Kings 17:16](#)). The Meal Offering of the Mosaic law called for unleavened fine flour mingled with oil baked in a pan ([Lev. 2:5](#)). And the prophet Ezekiel in reciting to Jerusalem all its past blessings from Jehovah said of her, "Thou didst eat fine flour, and honey, and oil" ([Ezek. 16:13](#)). See also [The Olive Tree](#).

Figs.

Figs

This fruit was often used in Old Testament times, especially dried figs. Abigail took two hundred cakes of figs to David ([1Sam. 25:18](#)). A cake of figs was given the Egyptian to revive him ([1Sam. 30:12](#)), and cakes of figs were brought to David at Hebron, at a time of great rejoicing ([1Chron. 12:40](#)). See also [The Fig Tree](#).

Grapes And Raisins

During the months of September and October, the fresh ripe grapes are eaten along with bread as one of the principal foods. Canaan must have been a land of very fine grapes, for two of the spies brought back a great cluster of grapes on a branch carried on a staff between them, and secured from the Valley of Eshcol ([Num. 13:23](#)). Raisins were widely used in the days when the Jews lived in Palestine. Abigail gave David one hundred clusters of raisins ([1Sam. 25:18](#)). Raisins were brought to David at Hebron ([1Chron. 12:40](#)) and again, when he was fleeing from Absalom, he received a quantity of them ([2Sam. 16:1](#)). See also [Use Of Grapes And Making Of Grape Products](#).

Pomegranates

There are several varieties of sweet and sour pomegranates in the land. The juice of the sour variety is used in the absence of lemons for the purposes of that fruit. The pomegranate was greatly esteemed as a fruit in early Bible times, for it was mentioned by Moses as one of the excellencies of the Promised Land ([Deut. 8:8](#)). The Song of Solomon makes mention of the pomegranate fruit, trees, and spiced wine from its juice ([Cant. 4:13](#); [Cant. 6:11](#); [Cant. 7:12](#); [Cant. 8:2](#)).

CHAPTER 5

CUSTOMS AT MEALTIME

EASTERN HABITS, connected with the eating of a meal, are such a decided contrast to Western habits, that much care should be given to the study of them, if the many references in the Bible to eating, are to be interpreted accurately.

Washing Of Hands Before Eating

Orientals are careful to wash their hands before a meal, but they would think that the Occidental way of washing in the water already made dirty by the hands, to be very untidy and disgraceful. The servant or whoever takes his place, pours water on the hands to be washed as they are held over a basin. Often the basin has a concave cover with holes, so as to allow the dirty water to run through and thus be out of sight. The method of eating without knives, forks, or spoons, makes this washing a necessity. That this method of washing was in vogue in the days of the prophets is seen by the way Elisha was characterized by the king's servants: "Here is Elisha the son of Shaphat, which poured water on the hands of Elijah" ([2Kings 3:11](#)). Elisha had served as Elijah's servant, and pouring water, so that his master could wash his hands, was an important part of his duties.

When the Pharisees complained against the disciples of Jesus, because they ate bread without washing their hands ([Matt. 15:1, 2](#); [Mark 7:1-5](#)), it was concerning a lengthy ceremonial washing of hands that they spoke. The Jewish hierarchy of that day had given forth a positive injunction as to exactly how this ablution should be done. It was not a law of Moses but a tradition of the elders. Jesus refused to sanction it as a rule that was binding. It was not the custom of washing hands before eating that Jesus objected to, but the authority the rabbis claimed to have in telling the people the exact and detailed manner in which it must be done.

Position While Eating



Eating a Meal

Eating a Meal

Picture:

According to general Arabic custom, the seemly posture while eating is "to sit erect on the floor at the low table, with the legs either folded under the body, or thrown back as in the act of kneeling." Thus in the desert tent of the Bedouin, or in the simple house of the Fellahin, this would be the position of those eating a meal. And we can be sure that this was the posture of the common people of Bible days in most cases. The exception to this rule is the custom of the wealthy, or the habit of the people on special occasions such as suppers or feasts; and this will be dealt with in a later section. It is easy to imagine Elisha and the sons of the prophets eating in the usual Oriental position, when it says concerning them: "And the sons of the prophets were sitting before him and he said unto his servant, Set on the great pot" ([2Kings 4:38](#)).

Table.

Use Of Table, Chairs, And Dishes

Table

In many cases the Arab custom would seem to indicate to the Westerner that they use no table at all, when serving a meal. Actually, a mat spread upon the ground serves the purpose of a table. This is especially true of the tent Arab. This was the early Semitic table of Old Testament times, for the Hebrew word "Shool-khawn," usually translated "table," has as its root meaning, "a skin or leather mat spread on the ground." With this sort of a table in view, the Psalmist can be understood when he said concerning his enemies, "Let their table become a snare before them." David's meaning would be, "Let their feet become entangled in it, as it is spread on the ground."

If the Arabs use more of a table than this mat, then it is likely to be a polygon stool, no higher than about fourteen inches, and those eating would sit on the floor around this Stool.

Chairs.

Chairs

With such an Oriental table in general use, it would follow that Occidental chairs would be largely missing. In regard to making use of chairs in ancient Bible days it has been said: "On ordinary occasions they probably sat or squatted on the floor around a low table, while at meals of more ceremony they sat on chairs or stools." The scriptural instances of chairs or stools used at mealtime, include Joseph's brothers sitting on seats at a banquet in Egypt ([Gen. 43:33](#)); and David's having a seat at the table of King Saul ([1Sam. 20:5, 18](#)). Both of these cases are connected with royalty or high position. On ordinary occasions the "chair" used by the vast majority of Israelites was the ground or floor on which would be spread a carpet or a mat.

Dishes.

Dishes

At an Oriental meal the only dishes are those in which the food is placed on the table; there are no dishes given to each one having a part in the meal. Often there is only one dish for the food, and it is usually a tray of basketwork, or a copper dish. Jesus spoke of His betrayer as "he that dippeth his hand with me in the dish" ([Matt. 26:23](#); [Mark 14:20](#)). In entertaining his guest, Gideon put the meat in a basket, and the broth in a pot ([Judges 6:19](#)).

Saying Grace At Meals

Before the Arabs begin their meal each person repeats after the Master of the house some such a grace as, "In the name of God," or, "Praise Allah," or, "God be praised."

In the Old Testament era the Jews were in the habit of saying grace at meals, and if a prophet was to be present he was expected to do it for them. Concerning Samuel when Saul was to eat the sacrifice with him, it was said, "He doth bless the sacrifice: and afterwards they eat that be bidden" ([1Sam. 9:13](#)).

In relating the miracle of Jesus feeding the five thousand John says, "And Jesus took the loaves and when he had given thanks, he distributed to the disciples . . ." ([John 6:11](#)). And concerning the feeding of the four thousand, Matthew is careful to include the blessing in his description: "And he took the seven loaves and the fishes, and gave thanks" ([Matt. 15:36](#)). Dr. Edersheim suggests that Christ may have prayed an extemporeaneous prayer for grace, or he may have used the formula widely used by the Jews of his day as a mealtime grace. Here is the formula: "Blessed art Thou, Jehovah our God, King of the world, who causes to come forth bread from the earth.

Also it was customary for the Jews in those days to have a second prayer of thanks at the end of the meal. Their authority for this was [Deut. 8:10](#): "When thou hast eaten and art full, then thou shalt bless the Lord thy God for the good land which he hath given thee." In the saying of these graces it was customary for one of the guests to give the thanks in a loud voice, and for the rest to say Amen, or to repeat some of the words of the grace.

Use Of Hand Instead Of Knife, Fork, Or Spoon

In general it may be said that the Arabs in eating do not use knives, forks, spoons, plates, or napkins which are considered so essential in the West. They say: "What does a man want of a spoon when God has given him so many fingers?" Sheets of bread, about as thick as heavy flannel; take the place of spoons or forks to some extent. A piece from this bread is broken off and shaped so as to put some of the food on it.

They use this bread to scoop up any partially liquid dish, such as soups, sauces, or gravies. Each torn off piece of bread that thus serves as a spoon is eaten along with the food it contains.

Meat is usually served in a single large dish and is eaten with the fingers. Broth is served in a separate dish and it is used to

moisten the bread. This method of eating is actually not as untidy as might be supposed.

The invitation Boaz gave to Ruth to eat with his workers, indicates that these same customs must have been in operation in those days: "And at meal-time Boaz said unto her, Come hither, and eat of the bread, and dip thy morsel in the vinegar" ([Ruth 2:14](#)). And at the last supper Jesus said to his disciples, "He that dippeth his hand with me in the dish, the same shall betray me" ([Matt. 26:23](#)). Furthermore, he spoke of dipping a choice portion of the meat called the sop into the dish ([John 13:26](#)). More will be said of this under the section dealing with suppers and banquets. Suffice it to say, that most of the Oriental customs of today in regard to eating date back, not only to the days of our Saviour, but also to the Old Testament era.

Washing After The Meal

After a typical Oriental meal, washing the hands again is of course essential. If there is a servant, he is the one to bring in the pitcher of water and basin, and the water is poured over the hands of those who have eaten the meal. A napkin is placed over the shoulder so that the hands may be dried. They do this for each other if there is no servant to do it for them. That this method of pouring water to wash hands was used in ancient times has already been seen concerning the washing of hands before eating.

CHAPTER 6

SPECIAL SUPPERS AND BANQUETS

SINCE THE DAILY MENU of the ordinary Oriental meal is and always has been very simple, something needs to be said about those special occasions when a more elaborate and expensive meal is served. The Scriptures abound in accounts of these formal occasions, such as weddings, birthdays, or other times when special guests are invited and a sumptuous meal is served.

Banquet Invitations

In some parts of the East a custom of double invitations to an entertainment has been observed. Some time before the feast is to be served, an invitation is sent forth; and then, when the appointed time draws near, a servant is sent again, this time to announce that everything is ready. There are several examples of this custom in the Bible. Ahasuerus and Haman were invited by Esther to a feast, and then when it was ready the king's chamberlains went to get Haman ([Esther 5:8](#); [Esther 6:14](#)). Another example is in the Parable of the Wedding of the King's Son. "The kingdom of heaven is like unto a certain king, which made a marriage for his son, and sent forth his servants to call them that were bidden to the wedding" ([Matt. 22:2, 3](#)). Again, the Parable of the Great Supper has this double invitation in it: "A certain man made a great supper, and bade many: and sent his servant at supper time to say to them that were bidden, Come; for all things are now ready" ([Luke 14:16, 17](#)).

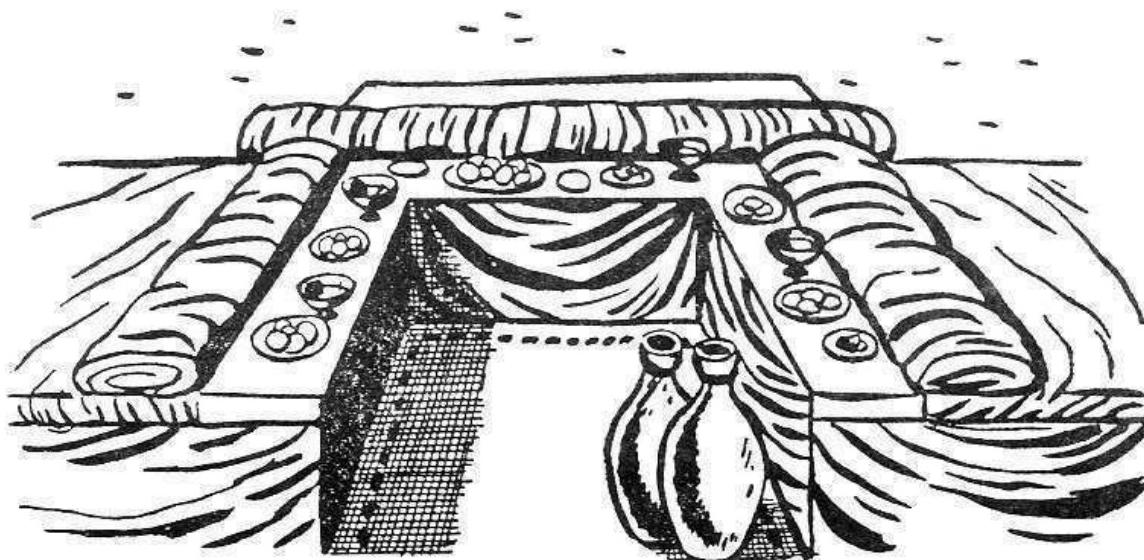
"Compelling" Guest To Attend

The following words of Christ's parable need to be understood from an Oriental point of view: "And the lord said unto the servant, Go out into the highways and hedges, and compel them to come in, that my house may be filled" ([Luke 14:23](#)). The usual brief invitation in America, and the ready acceptance of it would be considered in the East entirely undignified. In the East the one invited must not at first accept, but is expected rather to reject the invitation. He must be *urged* to accept. Although all the time he expects to accept, he must allow the one inviting him the privilege of "compelling him" to accept. It was thus that Lydia must have extended, and Paul and his companions must have finally accepted hospitality. "If ye have judged me to be faithful to the Lord, come into my house, and abide there. And she *constrained* us" ([Acts 16:15](#)). When one of the Pharisees invited Jesus to a meal, the Saviour did not at first accept the invitation, although he did go finally: "Now one of the Pharisees *insisted* that he take a meal with him" ([Luke 7:36](#), translation of A. T. Robertson). All of this was in keeping with Oriental customs.

Why Exclusion From A Feast Was Considered To Be So Terrible

Ancient banquets were usually held at night in rooms which were brilliantly lighted, and anybody who was excluded from the feast was said to be cast out of the lighted room into "the outer darkness" of the night. In the teachings of Jesus, such exclusion is likened unto the day of judgment. "The children of the kingdom shall be cast out into outer darkness" ([Matt. 8:12](#)). "Bind him hand and foot, and take him away, and cast him into outer darkness" ([Matt. 22:13](#)). "And cast ye the unprofitable servant into outer darkness: there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth" ([Matt. 25:30](#)). This expression "outer darkness" takes on new meaning, when it is realized what a dread the Oriental has for the darkness of the night. In the East a lamp is usually kept burning all night. To sleep in the dark as the Westerner usually does would be a terrible experience to the Oriental. Because of this fear of the darkness, the Saviour could have chosen no more appropriate words than "outer darkness" to represent the future punishment of the unrighteous.

Posture While Eating At Feasts



Triclinium Table Set for a Feast

Picture

Triclinium Table Set for a Feast

It has already been observed that on ordinary occasions the people of the Bible age mostly sat or squatted on the floor around a

low table at mealtime. In the King's circle, or at other times of special ceremony, seats were sometimes provided. The prophet Amos is the first sacred writer to refer to the custom of "stretching themselves upon their couches" when eating ([Amos 6:4](#)). By the time of Jesus, the Roman custom of reclining on couches at supper had been adopted in some Jewish circles. The Roman table and couches combined was called a *triclinium*. There were three couches which were located on the three sides of a square, the fourth side being left open, so that a servant could get on the inside to assist in serving the meal. The guest's position was to recline with the body's upper part resting on the left arm, and the head raised, and a cushion at the back, and the lower part of the body stretched out. The head of the second guest was opposite the breast of the first guest, so that if he wanted to speak to him in secret he would lean upon his breast.

This custom at a banquet table throws light on several passages from the four gospels. The Apostle John asked Jesus a question while in this position at supper ([John 13:23-25](#)). In the story of the Rich Man and Lazarus, when Jesus said that "the beggar died, and was carried by the angels into Abraham's bosom" ([Luke 16:22](#)), he doubtless meant to imply, that he was reclining at a heavenly table next to Abraham where he could lean upon his breast. This is clear in the light of Christ's description of that heavenly feast: "Many shall come from the east and the west; and shall recline with Abraham, and Isaac, and Jacob, in the kingdom of heaven" ([Matt. 8:11](#), A. R. V. margin). Also this position of reclining at table explains how the woman could come during a dinner and take her position behind at the feet of Jesus and wash them ([Luke 7:38](#)).

Places Of Honor At The Table

When the Pharisees were invited to a banquet, they were very covetous of having the highest places of distinction at the table. Jesus condemned them for this proud spirit. He said concerning them: "They . . . love the chief place at feasts" ([Matt. 23:6](#), A. R. V.). When Jesus was guest at a meal in a Pharisee's house, he gave the guests a parable, when he noticed how they sought the chief places at the table. Here is the parable as given by A. T. Robertson's Translation of Luke's Gospel ([Luke 14:8-10](#)):

When you are invited by anyone to a wedding-feast, do not recline in the post of honor, lest one more honored than you be invited by him, and lest the man who invited you both come and say to you, "Make room for this man"; and then you will begin with shame to take and keep the last place. But, when you are invited, go and recline in the last place, so that, when the man who has invited you comes, he will say to you, "Friend, come up much higher." Then you will have honor in the presence of all your fellow-guests.

In many native homes one room has a higher floor, and in this room the guests of honor are assigned places, and those of less honor on the lower floor or level. A place of special honor would be on the right of the host, and the next highest place on his left. James and John asked for such positions in Christ's kingdom ([Mark 10:35-37](#)). But Jesus advised guests to take the last place. Where was this place located? It was on the lower level and nearest the door. The guest who would take this humble place might be invited by the master of the house to take a place on a higher plane and farther from the door.

Food And Entertainment At Banquets

The prophet Amos, although he denounced extravagant luxuries and sinful excesses, nevertheless has given us a description of the eating, drinking, and other customs at an Oriental banquet. This is the way he describes it:

And stretch themselves upon their couches, and eat the lambs out of the flock, and the calves out of the midst of the stall; that chant to the sound of the viol, and invent to themselves instruments of music, like David; that drink wine in bowls, and anoint themselves with the chief ointments ([Amos 6:4-6](#)).

The meat eaten at these suppers included the best lambs from the flock and calves that had been stall-fed. The drinking of wine at the feast was considered an important feature. Playing on stringed instruments was another activity, and the guests evidently vied with one another in anointing their bodies with very costly ointments.

Dancing was often a part of the entertainment at these feasts. When the Prodigal Son returned home, and his father celebrated with a feast, there was music and dancing ([Luke 15:24, 25](#)). Dancing was a social diversion of the Hebrew women and girls, especially when they made merry. Men did sometimes engage in it, as when David danced when the ark was brought to Jerusalem ([2Sam. 6:14](#)). But more often it was the activity of the fair sex (cf. [Jer. 31:4](#)). But there is no Scriptural record that the Jewish men danced with the women, as is the modern custom of the West. Neither is there indication that there were public female dancers, as is true in some Eastern places today. The dancing of the daughter of Herodias ([Matt. 14:6](#)) before men at a sensual banquet was the kind introduced among the Jews by corrupt Greek influence.

Dipping Into The Dish And Giving The Sop

Oriental customs of eating must be kept in mind in order to understand the meaning of the words and action of Jesus, in relation to Judas Iscariot at the last supper. Mark's account reads:

Jesus said, Verily I say unto you, One of you which eateth with me shall betray me. And they began to be sorrowful, and to say unto him one by one, Is it I? and another said, Is it I? And he answered and said unto them, It is one of the twelve, that dippeth with me in the dish ([Mark 14:18-20](#)).

Some have supposed that Judas was in the position where he would be dipping at the same time with Jesus into the dish, and that he was thus singled out as the betrayer. But this could hardly be, since the other disciples did not discover who the betrayer was from these words of Jesus. Since they all had been eating from the same large dish, these words of Jesus, "he that dippeth with me in the dish," did not identify any one of them. All of them, as well as Judas, had been dipping into the dish with Jesus. Jesus was simply informing them that one of them now eating with him would become his betrayer.

Again, Christ's giving of the "sop" to Judas was in accordance with certain Eastern custom still observed in modern times. John reports what was done and said:

He then lying on Jesus' breast said unto him, Lord, who is it? Jesus answered, He it is, to whom I shall give a sop, when I have dipped it. And when he had dipped the sop, he gave it to Judas Iscariot ([John 13:25, 26](#)).

What is meant by the "sop"? It is the most tasty morsel of food being served at the feast. It may be served in the "bread spoon", but is more often picked up by the host with his thumb and finger, and handed directly to one of the guests. But why is a sop given to one of the guests? A native and resident of Bible lands says that certain villagers there have this custom of giving the sop today, and he describes the purpose of the act thus:

It is with them a mark of special respect for the master of the feast to hand to a guest portions of what is before him, or to insist on putting morsels or sops into his mouth with his own hand. I have had this done to me several times, when the intention was certainly to honor and manifest good will.

The meaning of what Christ did then was most certainly to extend love and friendship to the very one who was going to betray him. The act has been described as if the Lord were saying to the traitor:

Judas, my disciple, I have infinite pity for you. You have proved false, you have forsaken me in your heart; but I will not treat you as an enemy, for I have come not to destroy, but to fulfill. Here is my sop of friendship, and "that thou doest do quickly."

CHAPTER 7

THE SACRED DUTY OF HOSPITALITY

Oriental Attitudes On Entertaining A Guest

Eating Alone Disliked

IT IS A PART OF Oriental etiquette to want to share hospitality with others. After a meal has been prepared, an Arab has been heard to call out three times from a high spot in the neighborhood, inviting men to come and partake of the meal. These men of the desert do not like to eat their meal alone. The patriarch Job felt that way about it in his day: "Or have eaten my morsel myself alone, and the fatherless hath not eaten thereof" ([Job. 31:17](#)).

Guests Believed To Be Sent By God

These men of the East believe that a person who becomes their guest is sent to them by God. Thus their hospitality becomes a sacred duty. When one such a host entertained Westerners, he was so happy that, he wept tears of joy that "Heaven had sent him guests". When Abraham entertained three strangers who proved to be angels, he showed much the same attitude. His enthusiasm in receiving the guests would indicate his belief, that those he was to entertain were sent to him by the Lord. It is said that he "ran to meet" the three men, that he "hastened into the tent unto Sarah" to get her to make ready food, that he "ran unto the herd," and that he "fetched a calf," and that he "hasted to dress it" ([Gen. 18:2-7](#)).

Kinds Of Guests

Friends As Guests

In the East a friend is always welcome to receive hospitality. The Romans of New Testament times had a token of hospitality between two friends, which consisted of a tile of wood or stone, which was divided in half. Each person wrote his name on one of the two pieces, and then exchanged that piece with the other person. These were often kept and handed down from father to son. To produce the counterpart of one of these pieces would guarantee the hospitality of a real friend. The Book of Revelation no doubt refers to this custom in one of the promises to overcomers: "And will give him a white stone, and in the stone a new name written" ([Rev. 2:17](#)).

Strangers As Guests

There is an Oriental proverb that says, "Every stranger is an invited guest." The Bedouin Arab of today, like Abraham of old, will sit in the entrance way of his tent, in order to be on the watch for stranger guests ([Gen. 18:1](#)). The inspired apostle gave command concerning hospitality to this type of guest: "Be not forgetful to entertain strangers: for thereby some have entertained angels unawares" ([Heb. 13:2](#)). When Paul exhorted the Roman believers to be "given to hospitality" ([Rom. 12:13](#)), he was referring to the same thing, for the Greek word he used for hospitality, "fil-ox-en-ee-ah," means, "love to strangers." See also [Entertaining Fellow-Believers In New Testament Times](#).

Enemies As Guests

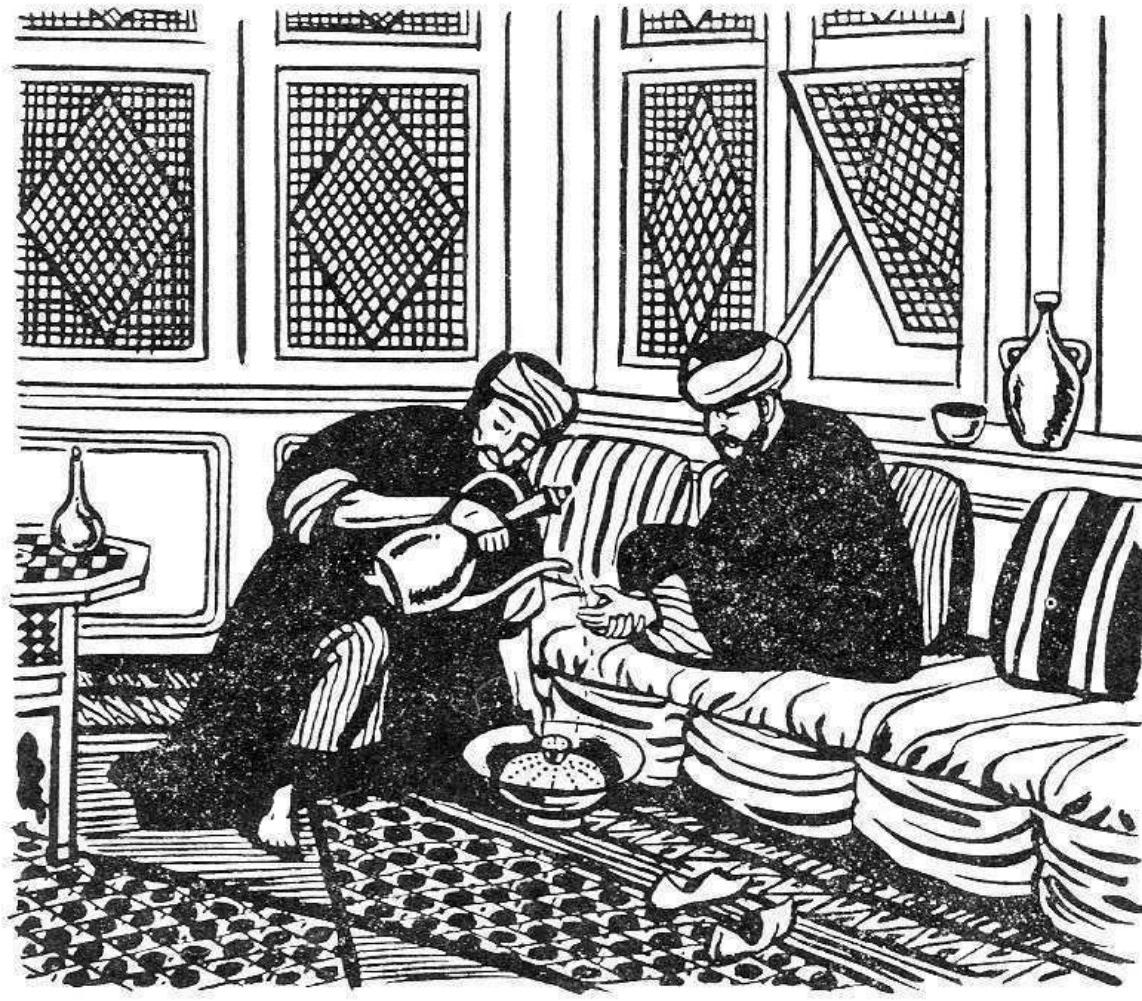
One remarkable feature of Oriental hospitality is that sometimes an enemy is received as a guest, and as long as he remains in that relationship, he is perfectly safe and is treated as a friend. There are certain Oriental tribes of tent-dwellers who have the rule that an enemy who has "once dismounted and touched the rope of a single tent, is safe."

Provision Made For Guest

Among Tent-dwellers

If a guest is entertained by one who lives in a tent, there is no separate place provided, nor would it be expected. Usually, the first section of the tent within the entrance is the regular guest apartment, which serves as dining room and sleeping quarters. The men eat with their guest and sleep with him. It was in this guest-apartment of his tent, that Abraham entertained his angel guests, when Sarah in the adjoining woman's apartment, overheard what was said ([Gen. 18:1-10](#)).

In The Villages And Cities



Oriental Guest Room

Picture:

Oriental Guest Room

If a village was not provided with a community guest room, then a guest would be entertained in one of the houses, and since most of these had but a single room, that one room would serve as reception room, dining room, and sleeping quarters. This room would be much like the reception apartment of the tent.

But in many of the villages and cities, a public guest chamber is provided. The food for guests entertained here is supplied by the families providing the room. Often a servant is hired to care for the room. The guest-room may be an upper room, or in summer, the shade of a large tree might serve as the guest-room. This room is the social gathering place for the men of the village. Women are not allowed in these guest chambers. So if a man has his family with him when traveling, he does not go to this public reception room, but waits until someone invites them into his house. The Book of Judges tells of a Levite traveling with his concubine and a servant, and how he was thus entertained by an old man ([Judges 19:15-21](#)). As many families sleep on the housetop in summer weather, a guest is often given that place for the night. Saul was entertained overnight on the rooftop and Samuel called to him early in the morning ([1Sam. 9:26](#), A. R. V.).

In the cities or where there are houses of more than one room, built around a courtyard, the guest-room is usually at the end of the court. As a rule this room is more open than other family rooms. This would correspond to the raised divan in some one-room houses, which serves as the place of honor for guests. In large houses a well-furnished room is provided near the door, so as not to disturb the family. If there is an upper room, a distinguished guest is often accommodated there. The man of God was provided such a room as a place of retirement ([2Kings 4:10](#)).

Bowing.

Customs When A Guest Enters A Home

Bowing

When a guest is received into an Oriental home, bowing between the guests and host is quite apt to take place. In Western lands such bowing would be of the head only, but in the East there is a more expressive custom of saluting with the head erect and the body a little inclined forward, by raising the hand to the heart, mouth, and forehead. The symbolic meaning of this action is to say something like this:

"My heart, my voice, my brain are all at your service"

But those who are used to this custom on many occasions enter into a more complete bow. They do not wait to do this only for royalty, but when they want to express thanks for a favor, or supplicate for a favor, and at many other times of meeting they often fall on their knees, and then incline the body touching the ground with their head, and kissing the lower part of the other person's clothing, or his feet, or even the dust at his feet. To those not acquainted with such manners, it would seem that one person was worshipping the other like he would worship God; but ordinarily, worship of this sort is not involved in the action. Cornelius is said to have worshipped Peter: "And as Peter was coming in, Cornelius met him and fell down at his feet, and worshipped him" ([Acts 10:25](#)). Of course Peter rejected this lest it might involve divine worship. Concerning the enemies of the Philadelphian church, the Apocalypse records these words of our Lord: "I will make them of the synagogue of Satan . . . I will make them to come and worship before thy feet" ([Rev. 3:9](#)). The Revisers have a marginal note in explanation of the word "worship" in both of these Scriptures: "The Greek word denotes an act of reverence, whether paid to a creature or to the Creator." There are many examples in the Bible of this Eastern custom of bowing in varying degrees of intensity (cf. [Gen. 18:2, 3](#); [Gen. 23:7, 12](#); [Matt. 18:26](#); [Rev. 19:10](#)).

Greeting.

Greeting

Upon entering an Arab house or a Bedouin tent, the greetings used are something like this: The host will say: "Salam alakum," which means, "Peace be on you." The guest will respond with the words: "Wa alakum es-salam," meaning, "And on you peace." Knowing that these Arabic customs date back for centuries, how significant then are the instructions of Jesus to his disciples, who were to be entertained in certain homes: "And into whatsoever house ye enter, first say, Peace be to this house, and if the son of peace be there, your peace shall rest upon it: if not, it shall turn to you again" ([Luke 10:5, 6](#)).

Kissing.

Kissing

Guests in Holy Land homes expect to be kissed as they enter. When entertained by a Pharisee, Jesus commented on his reception by saying to him, "Thou gavest me no kiss" ([Luke 7:45](#)). The difference between the Oriental and the Occidental way of greeting each other is made clear by one who lived in Palestine many years.

Here men shake hands when they meet and greet, but in Palestine, instead of doing this, they place their right hand on their friend's left shoulder and kiss his right cheek, and then reversing the action, place their left hand on his right shoulder, and kiss his left cheek. In this country men never kiss each other's faces; there it may be constantly seen. But how the practice lights up the numerous allusions in Scripture which are naturally lost to a Westerner! Once grasp the fact that their kiss answers to our hearty handshake between friends and social equals, and how much-how very much-becomes plain that was before obscure!

Scriptural examples of men kissing men might be multiplied. Jacob kissed his father ([Gen. 27:27](#)). Esau kissed Jacob ([Gen. 33:4](#)). Joseph kissed his brothers ([Gen. 45:15](#)). Jacob kissed the sons of Joseph ([Gen. 48:10](#)). Aaron kissed Moses ([Exod. 4:27](#)). Moses kissed Jethro ([Exod. 18:7](#)). David and Jonathan kissed each other ([1Sam. 20:41](#)). The Father kissed the Prodigal ([Luke 15:20](#)). The elders of Miletus kissed Paul ([Acts 20:37](#)). This custom is frequent in the Orient in modern times.

Removing The Shoes

Upon entering a house to be entertained, a guest does as all Orientals would do, he takes off his boots, shoes, or slippers before entering a room. This becomes necessary since they sit on a mat, rug, or divan, with their feet beneath them, and shoes would soil the couch and the clothes, and would also make a very uncomfortable seat. The idea of defilement from the shoes led to the custom of removing the shoes upon entering sacred places. Thus at the burning bush the Lord told Moses, "Put off thy shoes from off thy feet, for the place whereon thou standest is holy ground" ([Exod. 3:5](#)).

Washing The Feet

After bowing, greeting, and kissing, the Eastern guest is offered water for washing his feet. Wearing of sandals would naturally necessitate foot washing, but it is often done when shoes have been worn. A servant will assist the guest by pouring the water upon his feet over a copper basin, rubbing the feet with his hands, and wiping them with a napkin.

When Jesus and his disciples were gathered together, the Saviour took the place of the servant, and washed the feet of His disciples, who themselves had disdained to do such a humble task. John tells us that He "laid aside his garments; and took a towel, and girded himself. After that he poureth water into a basin, and began to wash the disciples' feet, and to wipe them with the towel" ([John 13:4, 5](#)). Paul gave as a recommendation of a widow: "If she have washed the saints' feet" ([1Tim. 5:10](#)). This custom was also common in Old Testament days ([Gen. 18:4](#); [Gen. 19:2](#); [Gen. 24:32](#); [Gen. 43:24](#); [1Sam. 25:41](#), etc.).

Anointing The Head With Oil

The custom of anointing guests with oil is an ancient one among nations of the East. Olive oil alone was often used, but sometimes it was mixed with spices. Simon the Pharisee was accused of lack of hospitality because he failed to anoint Jesus ([Luke 7:46](#)). This would indicate the custom was quite common in the days of the Gospel accounts. David immortalized the custom when he wrote his shepherd psalm and exclaimed: "Thou anointest my head with oil" ([Psa. 23:5](#)). Travelers in the Orient in recent times have discovered that this practice of anointing still exists in some quarters.

Caring For A Guest After Entrance

The Guest Given A Drink Of Water

One of the first things done for a guest who has been received, is to offer him a drink of water. The doing of this is recognizing him as being worthy of peaceful reception. Thus to give a drink of water is the simplest way to pledge friendship with a person. When Eliezer, Abraham's servant, sought a welcome, he did so by requesting of the maiden who came to the well to draw water ([Gen. 24:17, 18](#)), "Give me to drink, I pray thee, a little water of thy pitcher." And when she made answer, "Drink, my lord," it was an indication that he was welcome to be a guest at the nearby home. With this significance attached to a drink of water, the promise of Jesus takes on new meaning ([Mark 9:41](#)), "Whosoever shall give you a cup of water to drink in my name, because ye belong to Christ, verily I say unto you,

he shall not lose his reward. "

The Guest Served A Meal

The sharing of food is in the East a very special act of hospitality. It means far more than it means in the West. It is a way of making a covenant of peace and fidelity. When Abimelech wanted a permanent covenant with Isaac, the confirmation of that covenant came when Isaac "made them a feast, and they did eat and drink" ([Gen. 26:30](#)).

An Oriental considers as sacred the expression, "bread and salt." When it is said, "There is bread and salt between us" it is the same as saying, "We are bound together by a solemn covenant." A foe will not "taste the salt" of his adversary unless he is ready to be reconciled to him.

In some rural districts of Syria today there is a custom that a person on a mission of importance will not eat bread and salt of his host until first the purpose of his errand is made known. They think that the covenant of "bread and salt" must not be entered into until the attitude of the host is known regarding the mission of the guest. Thus Abraham's servant refused to eat at the table of Laban, until first he made known his mission of seeking a wife for Isaac ([Gen. 24:33](#)).

Dr. Thomson, Syrian missionary, was once guest in a Bedouin sheik's tent. The host dipped a bit of bread in some grape molasses and gave it to the missionary for him to eat. Then he said to him, "We are now brethren. There is bread and salt between us. We are brothers and allies." When the Gibeonites sought a covenant of friendship with Israel in the days of Joshua, it was said that the Israelites "took of their victuals, and asked not counsel at the mouth of the Lord" ([Josh. 9:14](#)). Once having entered into this covenant, Israel was bound to keep it.

The Guest Made Lord Of The House

An Eastern proverb runs thus: "The guest while in the house is its lord." This is a true statement of the spirit of the hospitality of the East. One of the first greetings a Palestinian host will give his guest is to say, "Hadtha beitak," i.e., "This is your house." This saying is repeated many times. Thus actually the guest during his stay is master of the house. And whenever the guest asks a favor, in granting it the host will say, "You do me honor."

There must have been the same attitude between host and guest in the days of Lot. The host was considered to be a servant, and the guest was lord. Thus Lot spoke of himself and his guests: "Behold now, my lords, turn in, I pray you, into your servant's house" ([Gen. 19:2](#)).

Privacy Not Expected By The Guest

An Oriental guest would think he was ill-treated if he were left alone at any time. He does not need privacy at night, because he sleeps with his clothes on. He is happy to have others sleep with him. If a sleeping place is assigned to him in an upper room, then some of the family sons sleep alongside of him that he might have their companionship. He would feel he was being deserted if treated the way he would be if entertained in the West, just as a Westerner would feel oppressed by the constant attentions of an Oriental host.

Protecting A Guest

In the lands of the East, when a host accepts a man to be his guest he thereby agrees at whatever the cost to defend his guest from all possible enemies during the time of his entertainment. Dr. Cyrus Hamlin, an American missionary in the East, was entertained by a governor. The host took a piece of roast mutton and handed it to the missionary, saying as he did so, "Now do you know what I have done?" In answering his own question he went on to say: "By that act I have pledged you every drop of my blood, that while you are in my territory no evil shall come to you. For that space of time we are brothers." The Psalmist felt utterly secure, though he had enemies close by him, when he knew that God was his host. "Thou preparest a table before me in the presence of mine enemies" ([Psa. 23:5](#)).

The Abuse Of Hospitality

Among Eastern nations it is considered a terrible sin indeed for anybody who has accepted hospitality from a host to turn against him in the doing of an evil deed. This feeling goes back to very ancient times and is often alluded to by various writers. The prophet Obadiah refers to this sin: "The men that were at peace with thee have deceived thee . . . They that eat thy bread have laid a wound under thee" ([Obad. 1:7](#)). The Psalmist David speaks of this terrible evil, "Yea, mine own familiar friend, in whom I trusted, which did eat my bread, hath lifted up his heel against me" ([Psa. 41:9](#)). And the Lord Jesus quotes this very passage from the Psalms as having its fulfillment in the treachery of Judas the betrayer, who ate at the same table with Him ([John 13:18](#)).

Renewing A Broken Covenant

Among oriental people, when a covenant of friendship has been once broken, it may be renewed by those involved once again eating together. After His resurrection, Jesus ate at least three times with various disciples of His, and this was no doubt done in order to renew the covenant, which had been broken by their disloyalty to Him during the days of His passion (cf. [Luke 24:30, 41-43](#); [John 21:12, 13](#)). In the Old Testament we have an example of this when Jacob and Laban were in strained relationship. They restored their friendship by eating together, as well as entering into an oath ([Gen. 31:53, 54](#)).

The Departure Of A Guest

When the time comes for a guest to depart, a Syrian host will do his best to delay the departure. He will beg him to stay for one more meal, or to wait until the morrow before he leaves. In Judges nineteen is the finest example in the Bible of this custom of delaying the guest. The host said to the guest: "Comfort thine heart with a morsel of bread, and afterward go your way." After the meal he urged him, "Tarry all night." The next day the guest was persuaded to tarry until afternoon. But when urged to stay over another night, the guest decided it was time to insist on departing, which he did. This is typical Oriental procedure ([Judges 19:5-10](#)).

When a guest departs, the usual salutation is as follows. The guest will say: "With your permission." And the host will make answer, "Depart in peace." Isaac must have used just such a salutation when Abimelech and his men departed, after having been entertained by Isaac at a meal. Scripture says: "And they departed from Isaac in peace" ([Gen. 26:31](#)).

When a host desires to do special honor to his departing guest, he will walk with him out of the town a distance. Sometimes this walk will last for an hour, and will come to an end only after the guest has urged his host that he need not go any farther. Thus Abraham walked with his departing guests "to bring them on the way" ([Gen. 18:16](#)).

CHAPTER 8

DAILY PROGRAM OF ACTIVITIES

Early Rising

CONCERNING THE HOUR OF RISING, one writer has summed up the matter thus:

The habit of early rising is all but universal in Palestine. The climate makes this a necessity for the greater part of the year, the heat being so great that hard labor is oppressive a few hours after sunrise. At early dawn laborers go to their work and travelers start on their journeys.

Many Bible passages indicate that the custom of early rising was practiced in those days. The Genesis account mentions an occasion when "Abraham rose early in the morning" ([Gen. 22:3](#)). The Book of Exodus tells that "Moses rose up early in the morning" ([Exod. 34:4](#)). And Scripture says that on a certain day "Job rose up early in the morning" ([Job 1:5](#)). Concerning the people who wished to hear Christ's teachings, Luke says, "And all the people came early in the morning to him in the temple, for to hear him" ([Luke 21:38](#)). And Mark says of Jesus, "And in the morning, rising up a great while before day, he went out, and departed into a solitary place, and there prayed" ([Mark 1:35](#)). Other such examples of early rising in Scripture times could be added.

Grinding Of The Grain By The Women



Women Grinding Grain

Picture:

Women Grinding Grain

The first sound to greet the ear in the early morning in many a Palestinian village will be the sound of the grinding of the grain. Today, as in the long ago, many of these people resort to the handmill for this purpose. A traveler passing by these humble homes will hear the hum of the handmill morning or evening and sometimes after dark. This sound of the grinding is not exactly musical, and yet many love to go to sleep under it. In the mind of those who live in the East this sound is associated with home, and comfort, and plenty. The women are the ones who engage in this task, and they begin it early in the morning, and it often requires half a day to complete.

When Jeremiah foretold judgment upon Israel for her sins, he said concerning what God would take from her: "I will take from them the voice of mirth, and the voice of gladness, the voice of the bridegroom, and the voice of the bride, and *the sound of the millstones*" ([Jer. 25:10](#)). From this it can be seen that the sound of these handmills is an indication of life and activity, and the absence of them would be a sign of utter desolation.

The Bible references to the grinding mills are true to Oriental customs. The task is for servants if the family has them, and if not the women do the job, but the men would consider it beneath them to engage in such a menial task. Part of the judgment upon Israel at the destruction of Jerusalem was that the enemy "took the young men to grind" ([Lam. 5:13](#)). And the Philistines punished Samson in this way, for it says of him, "and he did grind in the prison house" ([Judges 16:21](#)).

Although there are simple handmills made for the use of one person, more often two women operate one together. The mill is composed of two stones eighteen to twenty-four inches in diameter. The two women sit at these stones facing each other. The upper stone turns upon the lower one by means of an upright handle which the women alternately pull and push. Here is how the process works:

The upper stone rotates about a wooden pivot fixed in the center of the lower. The opening in the upper stone for the pivot is funnel-shaped to receive the corn, which each woman throws in as required with her disengaged hand. The flour issuing from between the stones is usually caught on a sheepskin placed under the Mill.

Job speaks of a heart being as "hard as a piece of the nether millstone" ([Job 41:24](#)). Thomson says that the lower millstone is not always harder than the upper, but he had seen the nether made of a very compact and thick sandstone, while the upper was of lava no doubt because being lighter it would be easier to drive it around with the hand.

Time Of Meals

Meals are not always served at the same time in the Orient today, and the nature of the meals varies in different sections. The same was also true in Biblical times. In the main it may

be said that the Hebrews had only two meals a day, breakfast, and dinner. The time for breakfast varied all the way from early morning to noon. Jesus served breakfast to a group of hungry fishermen early in the morning ([John 21:12](#), A. R. V.). In commenting on the negligence of the guards of King Eglon ([Judges 3:24](#)), the Jewish historian Josephus says: "It was then summer time, and the middle of the day, when the guards were not strictly on their watch, both because of the heat, and because they were gone to dinner." Attention is called to the fact that the word Josephus uses for "dinner" is the word meaning "breakfast" as used in the New Testament. It would appear from this that the Jewish historian was indicating that sometimes breakfast was served as late as noon in his day. No doubt it was more often served in the middle of the morning. In the Parable of the Wedding of the King's Son, the message went forth to the invited guests, "I have prepared my breakfast" ([Matt. 22:4](#), Twentieth Century N. T.). The marriage feast here would be similar then to the English "wedding breakfast."

Both meals of the Jews are mentioned by Jesus in an exhortation he gave his host, "When you give a breakfast or a dinner" ([Luke 14:12](#), Twentieth Century N. T.). The evening meal would in most cases be the main meal, but not always, depending on the nature and place of the men's work. The custom in some modern cities of having breakfast anywhere from nine to twelve o'clock, and dinner in the evening, would correspond quite closely with the two meals of the Jews of Bible times.

Weaving Cloth And Making Clothes

The Jewish women were responsible for making the clothing for the family. The wool which was used came from theft flocks. It had to be spun into yarn without the use of modern spinning wheels. Concerning this process, the Book of Proverbs in its tribute to the ideal mother, describes it thus: "She layeth her hands to the spindle, and her hands hold the distaff" ([Prov. 31:19](#)). The ancient Egyptians and Babylonians, being experts in weaving, had large looms, but for the most part the common people of Palestine used a very primitive loom and the weaving process was of necessity a slow and tedious one. Of course there were no sewing machines or steel needles. Their needles were coarse ones made of bronze or sometimes of splinters of bone that had been sharpened at one end, and with a hole through the other end.

It is said that today most of the spinning in Syria is done by the older women. It gives occasion for these spinners to get together. And they spin while they talk, or even sometimes while they are eating in an informal way. When Scripture says, "She layeth her hands to the spindle, and her hands hold the distaff" ([Prov. 31:19](#)), it is the same way as saying, "She is never idle," or as the Syrians would say, "Her spindle is never out of her hands."

Washing Clothes

The Arab women in washing their clothes today usually go to nearby sources of water such as streams, pools, or watering troughs. They will dip their clothes in and out of the water, and then placing them upon flat stones which abound in Palestine, they will beat them with a club which is about a foot and a half long. They carry the water in goatskins and have a vessel for rinsing purposes .

That this sort of process was used in the time of David is indicated by the prayer of his penitential psalm: "Wash me thoroughly from mine iniquity" ([Psa. 51:2](#)). His picture here comes from the process of washing clothes. Alexander Maclaren says concerning it:

The word employed is significant, in that it probably means washing by kneading or beating, not by simple rinsing. The psalmist is ready to submit to any painful discipline, if only he may be cleansed. "Wash me, beat me, tread me down, hammer me with mallets, dash me against the stones, do anything with me, if only these foul stains are melted from the texture of my soul."

That soap was used in washing is clear from the Scriptures. The word occurs in the common translation of the books of Jeremiah and Malachi ([Jer. 2:22](#) and [Mal. 3:2](#)). This form of soap was doubtless a vegetable alkali. Job said: "If I wash myself with snow water, and cleanse my hands with lye" ([Job 9:30](#), A. R. V. margin). This was a vegetable alkali. There are two references in the Bible to mineral alkali which was called nitre ([Prov. 25:20](#) and [Jer. 2:22](#)). This was probably the "natron" used so largely in Egypt.

Caring For The Goats By The Girls

Among the Bedouin Arabs where camels engage the attention of the men folks, the task of caring for the goats is assigned to the young women of the home. These shepherdesses sometimes have a difficult time in watering their flocks, if perchance the camel herders come in from one of their five-day waterless periods of grazing. These girls are not apt to get much consideration from these men. The Sacred Record tells how Moses befriended Jethro's daughters when they had to fight for an opportunity to give water to their flocks. One of these girls afterwards became the wife of Moses ([Exod. 2:15-21](#)).

The Midday Siesta

In Palestine during the summer season the time of greatest heat is from noon to three o'clock in the afternoon. There is cessation of most activity during that time in many parts of the land. They rest at home or wherever they may be and can find a suitable place. A laundry or shop will often be discovered to be closed during those hours.

This midday time of rest was common in Old Testament days. Genesis says that Abraham "sat in the tent-door in the heat of the day" ([Gen. 18:1](#)). Ishbosheth, Saul's son, was sleeping at midday. "Who lay on a bed at noon" ([2Sam. 4:5](#)). And when Saul entered the cave where David and his men were located, he no doubt did so in order to have his middle-of-the-day nap. "And Saul went in to cover his feet" ([1Sam. 24:3](#)).

Daily Conversation

Use Of God's Name In Conversation

In Anglo-Saxon lands the name of God is seldom mentioned in daily conversation except by those who are profane. But among the Arabs of Bible lands, God's name is constantly on the lips of these people. An astonished person will exclaim, "Mashallah," i.e., "What has God wrought!" which is the very expression used by Balaam centuries ago ([Num. 23:23](#)). If a man is asked if he expects to do a certain thing, he will make answer, "If God wills." And this is the kind of answer recommended by James in his epistle ([Jas. 4:15](#)). If a baby is held up that you may admire it, the grandmother will say, "Behold the gift of God," words which are reminiscent of the Psalmist's declaration, "Lo, children are an heritage of the Lord" ([Psa. 127:3](#)). When a farmer greets his workers he says to them, "God be with you." And they will answer him, "God bless thee." These are the same greetings used centuries ago when Boaz came to his workers ([Ruth 2:4](#)). Such pious expressions, of course, could be used so constantly that they become meaningless, and on the lips of insincere people would soon lose their value. But such conversation is a great contrast to what is heard in the West.

From the days of the patriarchs to the times of the Apostles, daily conversation among the Jews included many references to Deity. No doubt there were insincere lips that spoke the name of God carelessly, but when this custom was carried out by godly people, how beautiful it was! The Book of Ruth has a number of examples of such conversation, as for example, when Naomi's women friends exclaimed: "Blessed be the Lord!" ([Ruth 4:14](#)). It would be well if modern Christians had more of God in their daily conversation.

Use Of Figurative Language And Exaggerated Expressions

Often the oriental manner of speech is to picture what is meant, or perhaps to demonstrate it. A good example of this is given us by Luke in his account of Paul's experiences:

There came down from Judea a certain prophet, named Agabus. And when he was come unto us, he took Paul's girdle, and bound his own hands and feet, and said, Thus saith the Holy Ghost, So shall the Jews at Jerusalem bind the man that owneth this girdle ([Acts 21:10-11](#)).

If John the Baptist had spoken like some speakers in the West, he would have said, "Your pretensions to virtue and good birth far exceed your actual practice of virtue." Being a real Oriental he actually said:

.PIO generation of vipers, who hath warned you to flee from the wrath to come? Bring forth therefore fruits meet for repentance. And think not to say within yourselves, We have Abraham to our father: for I say unto you, that God is able of these stones to raise up children unto Abraham ([Matt. 3:7-9](#)).

The large use of figures of speech in its teaching and conversation make the Book a typical Oriental book

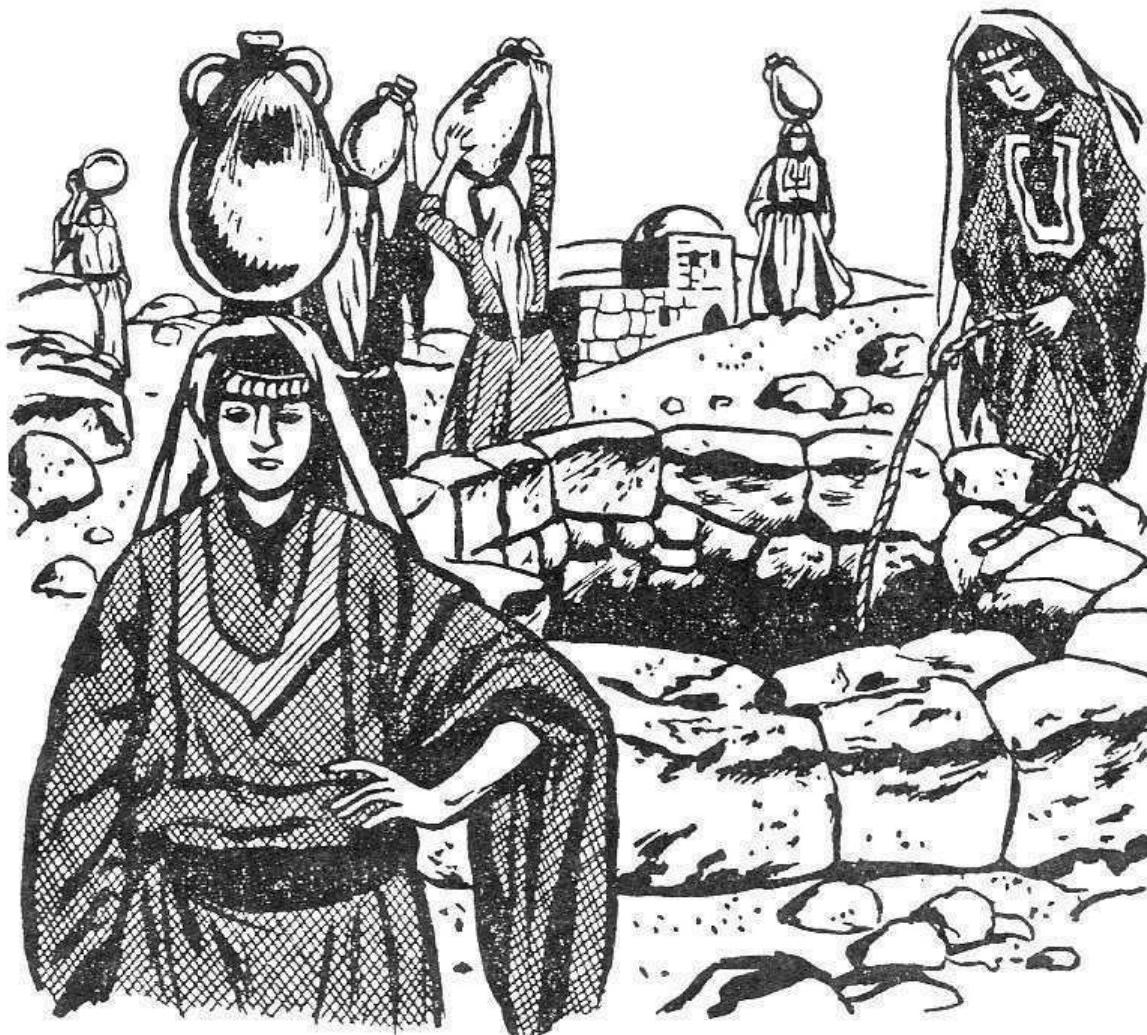
The Oriental frequently makes statements that to the Westerner sound like uncalled-for exaggeration. One man will say to another, "What I say to you is truth, and if it is not, I will cut off my right arm." Or he will say, "I promise you this, and if I fail in fulfilling my promise, I will pluck out my right eye." In those lands nobody would ever dream that such a resolution would be carried out. The statement simply means that the speaker is in earnest.

An Oriental can fully appreciate what Jesus meant when he said, "If thy right eye offend thee, pluck it out, and cast it from thee. If thy right hand offend thee, cut it off, and cast it from thee" ([Matt. 5:29, 30](#)). Many expressions of Jesus need to be understood in the light of daily conversation of his day. Here are examples of a few. "It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle, than for a rich man to enter into the kingdom of God" ([Matt. 19:24](#)). "Ye blind guides, which strain at a gnat, and swallow a camel" ([Matt. 23:24](#)). "And why beholdest thou the mote that is in thy brother's eye, but considerest not the beam that is in thine own eye?" ([Matt. 7:3](#)). When reading such passages of Scripture, men from the Occident must remember the fondness of the Oriental for the hyperbole.

Dealing With Delicate Subjects In Mixed Company

Visitors to Palestine from other parts of the world are often embarrassed by the way the daily conversation of the natives may include matters never spoken of in polite circles in the West. The Oriental considers it to be perfectly proper to talk about anything that is natural in the presence of men, women, and children. And this is done in refined circles. A respectable woman from the Holy Land cannot understand why some critics of the Bible have condemned the Scriptural mention of certain matters deemed wrong for Westerners to talk about. The story told in Genesis of the details concerning the birth of twin boys, Esau and Jacob ([Gen. 25:23-26](#)), would be told in a public gathering in the East, with even more details, without a blush coming to any face. Several hundred years ago this same thing was true in England.

Going Of The Women For Water



Women Carrying Water Jars

Picture:

Women Carrying Water Jars

It is the task of the women to go for the household water to the well or spring. And they do it today in many places in the East just like it was done when the Genesis account speaks of it being "the time of the evening, even the time that women go out to draw water" ([Gen. 24:11](#)). The women are trained to do this from girlhood, for Saul and his servant "found young maidens going out to draw water" ([1Sam. 9:11](#)). The chief time for doing this is in the late afternoon or evening, although it is often done early in the morning. Earthenware pitchers ([Lam. 4:2](#)) are used for the purpose, and they have one and sometimes two handles.

It has been customary for Syrian women to carry the pitcher of water on their shoulder, although sometimes it is carried on the hip. Most Arabs of Palestine carry it upon their head. Scripture says that Rebekah carried her pitcher on her shoulder ([Gen. 24:15](#)).

Carrying a pitcher of water was all but universally done by women. It must have been a picturesque sight to see them going and coming with the pitcher poised gracefully upon the head or shoulder. When Jesus instructed two of his disciples, "Go ye into the city, and there shall meet you a *man* bearing a pitcher of water: follow him" ([Mark 14:13](#)), that would be an easy way of identifying the person, for it is exceedingly uncommon to see a man carrying a pitcher of water, which is a woman's task. When larger supplies of water are needed, men use large skins of sheep or goats for carrying the supply. The pitchers are reserved for the use of the women.

There is nothing left at the well that may be used for drawing water from a depth. Each woman who comes for water brings with her, in addition to the pitcher in which to carry the water, a hard leather portable bucket with a rope, in order to let it down to the level of the water. The Samaritan woman whom Jesus met at Jacob's well had brought all this with her, but Jesus did not have such equipment with him. Hence she said to him: "You have no bucket, sir, and the well is deep" ([John 4:11](#), Twentieth Century N. T.). In response to his request for a drink, she drew from the well and gave to him.

CHAPTER 9

DRESS AND ORNAMENTATION

THE STYLES OF DRESS in Anglo-Saxon lands are undergoing a constant change, whereas, in Eastern countries, the manner of dress today is largely the same as it was centuries ago. There is a prevalent view in Bible lands that it is morally wrong to change anything that is ancient. Thus the prevailing Palestinian dress of modern times (except of the Jews who have gone back to their land from various parts of the globe) is much as it was in the epoch that produced the Bible.

The Inner Garment-tunic Or Shirt

The tunic (inappropriately translated "coat") was a shirt which was worn next to the skin. It was made of leather, haircloth, wool, linen, or in modern times, usually of cotton. The simplest form of it was without sleeves and reached to the knees or sometimes to the ankles. The well-to-do wore it with sleeves and extending to the ankles. Women as well as men wore it ([Cant. 5:3](#), A. R. V.), although there was no doubt a difference in style and pattern in what was worn by the two.

Among the lower classes, the tunic was often the only dress worn in warm weather. Persons of higher rank might wear the tunic alone inside the house, but would not wear it without the outer garment outside, or when they were to receive a caller. In the Bible the term "naked" is used of men clad only with their tunic (cf. [Isa. 20:2-4](#); [Micah 1:8](#); [John 21:7](#)). To be dressed in such a scanty manner was thought of as "nakedness."

As a rule the Jews of Christ's day had at least a change of apparel. A man would be considered poor to have only one garment. Yet John the Baptist said to those who heard him, "The man who has two shirts must share with him who has none" ([Luke 3:11](#), Williams). And when Jesus sent out the Twelve on a preaching and healing mission, He told them not to take an extra undergarment with them ([Matt. 10:10](#), Williams).

The apparel which Jacob gave to Joseph ([Gen. 37:3](#)) is, after the Septuagint and Vulgate, rendered in our English translations, "coat of many colors." But the Hebrew expression here is the same as the one used for the garment worn by Tamar the daughter of King David, and translated in the Greek and Latin, "a sleeved tunic." see ([2Sam. 13:18](#)) A. R. V. margin. For this reason many Bible scholars believe it was a long undergarment with sleeves: The working classes usually wore a short tunic, whereas the aristocracy wore a long tunic with long sleeves. Thus it would be a mark of distinction for Joseph to wear the latter. But some are inclined to think it was a robe worn over the tunic.

The garment of Jesus for which the Roman soldiers cast lots, was a tunic without seam ([John 19:23](#), A. R. V. margin). It has often been referred to as a robe, but this is not correct, for it was not his outer garment, but rather his *undergarment*. Unfortunate translations have been responsible for this erroneous idea.

The Outer Tunic Or Robe

In Bible times there was a looser and longer kind of tunic that was sometimes used but not by the ordinary people. Scripture indicates its use by kings ([1Sam. 24:4](#)), prophets ([1Sam. 28:14](#)), nobles ([Job 1:20](#)), and sometimes youths ([1Sam. 2:19](#)). Some Bible scholars believe it to have been a third garment, i.e., in addition to the ordinary tunic and outside mantle. But others have thought of it as a special robe that was worn over the undergarment, and thus might have taken the place of the mantle.

The Girdle

If the tunic was ungirded it would interfere with a person's ability to walk freely, and so a girdle was always worn when leaving home for any kind of a journey. See ([2Kings 4:29](#); [Acts 12:8](#)). There were and are today two kinds of girdles. One, a common variety, is of leather, usually six inches broad and furnished with clasps. This was the kind of girdle worn by Elijah ([2Kings 1:8](#)), and by John the Baptist ([Matt. 3:4](#)). The other, a more valuable variety, is of linen ([Jer. 13:1](#)), or sometimes of silk or embroidered material. It is generally a handbreadth wide. The girdle served as a pouch in which to keep money ([2Sam. 18:11](#)) and other things that might be needed ([Mark 6:8](#)). The girdle was used to fasten a man's sword to his body ([1Sam. 25:13](#)). Thus the girdle was a very useful part of a man's clothing.

The Scriptures often make symbolic use of the girdle. When Jesus said to His disciples: "Let your loins be girded about" ([Luke 12:35](#)), it was as if He had said: "Be as men who have a long race to run; gather up the folds of your flowing robes, and fasten them with your girdle; that nothing may keep you back or impede your steps." In Bible language, "to be girded" means: "to be ready for action" (cf. [Psa. 18:39](#)). The prophet Isaiah spoke of righteousness as the girdle of Messiah's loins when He rules the world ([Isa. 11:5](#)). And Paul calls truth to be the Christian's girdle in his warfare with Satan ([Eph. 6:14](#)).

The Outer Garment, Or Mantle



Oriental Dress (Men)

Picture:

Oriental Dress (Men)

The outer garment which the Palestinian villager wears, is a large cloak which would serve the purpose of a Westerner's overcoat. It is made of wool or goat's hair and sometimes of cotton. It is dark brown and different shades with whitish perpendicular stripes. It serves as a shelter from the wind and rain, and as a blanket at night. It is a more or less common sight to behold a man walking on a hot day wearing his heavy cloak, and if he should be asked why he does so, his answer would be, "What keeps out the cold, keeps out the heat also." It was this outer garment or mantle with which Elijah smote the waters of Jordan and crossed over with Elisha, and when he was taken up to Heaven this mantle became the property of Elisha ([2Kings 2:8-13](#)). The three young men who were cast into the fiery furnace were clad in their mantles as well as their tunics and other garb ([Dan. 3:21](#), A. R. V.).

The Law of Moses contained an explicit commandment regarding this outer garment. This is the way the law reads:

If thou at all take thy neighbor's raiment to pledge, thou shalt deliver it unto him by that the sun goeth down: for that is his covering only, it is his raiment for his skin: wherein shall he sleep? And it shall come to pass, when he crieth unto me, that I will hear; for I am gracious ([Exod. 22:26, 27](#)).

The need for this commandment is easily understood when it is known how the mantle is used at night. Going to bed at night is a very simple matter for the Bedouins or peasants. Mats, rugs, or mattresses are used to lie upon, but the host does not provide any covering. Each person provides his own which consists of his mantle. Being closely woven, it is warm, and if he sleeps out-of-doors, this covering is even waterproof.

It was because this outer garment was a man's covering by night that the law did not allow anybody taking this as a pledge or security, for this would deprive him of his means of keeping warm while sleeping. Such a garment if taken at all had to be returned by sunset.

A knowledge of this law and its purpose is an aid in understanding certain statements of Christ. On one occasion He said: "Do not

keep back your undergarment from the one who robs you of your outer one" ([Luke 6:29](#), translation of A. T. Robertson). This order is understood easily, because the outer garment would be the one most easily seized by a robber. But on another occasion He said. "If any one wishes to go to law with you and deprive you of your undergarment, let him take your outer one also" ([Matt. 5:40](#), Weymouth). A Jewish court would not award an outer garment as judgment, because of the rule of the Law of Moses already referred to, but could award an undergarment. In such a case Jesus advocated going the "second mile" by giving the outer garment also.

Because of the fullness of the mantle it served as a means of carrying various things therein. The lap was often filled with grain or fruit. Jesus said, "Give, and it shall be given unto you; good measure, pressed down, and shaken together, and running over, shall men give into your bosom" ([Luke 6:38](#)). Ruth could put six measures of barley into her mantle ([Ruth 3:15](#), A. R. V.). Thus the upper garment served many useful purposes.

Headdress

The Jews of Bible times gave much attention to the care of their hair. The young people loved to wear it long and curled ([Cant. 5:11](#), A. R. V. margin), and they were proud to have thick and abundant hair ([2Sam. 14:25, 26](#)). Middle-aged men and priests would occasionally cut their hair but very little. Baldness was scarce and suspicion of leprosy was often attached to it. Thus when the youth said of Elisha, "Go up, thou bald head" ([2Kings 2:23](#)), it was using an extreme curse, for the prophet being a young man, may not actually have been bald-headed. Men would not cut their beards, but allow them to grow long ([2Sam. 10:4, 5](#)). Beards would be anointed with oil often.

In public the Jews always wore a turban, for at certain seasons of the year it is dangerous in Palestine to expose the head to the rays of the sun. This turban was of thick material and passed several times around the head. It was somewhat like our handkerchief and was made of linen, or recently of cotton. The patriarch Job and the prophet Isaiah mention the use of the turban as a headdress ([Job 29:14](#), A. R. V. margin; [Isa. 3:23](#), A. R. V.). In place of the turban, the Palestinian Arabs today, for the most part, wear a head veil called "Kaffieh" which hangs down over part of their garment.

Sandals

The shoes as worn by the majority in New Testament times were no doubt what we would call sandals. They consisted of a sole of either wood or leather, which was fastened to the foot by leather thongs. Some people wore that which was more like an Occidental shoe. With these, either the entire foot was covered, or the toes were left bare. Such shoes were probably considered to be a luxury, for the Bible references to footwear indicate the universal use of sandals.

The Old Testament often makes mention of the sandals. The prophet Amos said, "Because of their selling for silver the righteous, and the needy for a pair of sandals" ([Amos 2:6](#), Young). And Abraham spoke of the sandal thongs ([Gen. 14:23](#)). The New Testament references to sandals are also numerous. The angel told Peter, "Gird thyself and bind on thy sandals" ([Acts 12:8](#)). And John the Baptist refers to the latchet (thong, Robertson) of Messiah's sandals ([Mark 1:7](#)).

The Difference Between Women's Dress And Men's



Oriental Dress (Women)

Picture:

Oriental Dress (Women)

The law of Moses forbade a man to wear a woman's clothing, and a woman to wear a man's clothing ([Deut. 22:5](#)). Among the Bedouin Arabs of Palestine there is a great care that either sex shall not imitate the other in matters of dress. A traveler one day discovered a Bedouin man who had put on a woman's garment while doing some rough work. He was hired to be a guide, but the man was very careful that none of his countrymen should see him in a woman's garb, and hurried away as soon as possible to change into a man's apparel.

The difference between the dress of women and men needs to be noted carefully.

The dress of women was different in detail rather than in kind. They too wore tunic and cloak. We may suppose that in every case their dress was a little more elaborate. Doubtless they wore longer tunics, larger mantles than their menfolk. And if they did, they may be said to have had every right to them, for they generally made not only their own clothes but those of their lords.

The *veil* was the distinctive female wearing apparel. All females, with the exception of maidservants and women in a low condition of life, wore a veil. They would usually never lay it aside, except when they were in the presence of servants, or on rare occasions. This custom has prevailed among the Eastern women down to the modern era. When traveling, women may throw the veil over the back part of their head, but if they see a man approaching, they place it back in its original position. Thus Rebekah, when she saw Isaac approaching her camel caravan, covered her face with her veil ([Gen. 24:64, 65](#)). When women are at home they do not speak to a guest without being veiled and in the presence of maids. They do not enter the guest's chamber, but rather, standing at the door, they make it known to the servant what is wanted. See ([2Kings 4:12, 13](#)). It is well to remember that prostitutes went unveiled. Today, as in olden times, virgins and married women may be seen wearing veils in Bible lands. The old customs are not being observed strictly by some Moslem Women, for they are now going unveiled.

Although it was the custom for women to wear a veil entirely covering their head, when they were in public, this custom was not always strictly enforced among the Hebrew women. They were allowed more liberty than the Arab women are allowed today. The Egyptians saw Sarah's face ([Gen. 12:14](#)). While Hannah was praying, Eli "marked her mouth" ([1Sam. 1:12](#)). When a woman kept her

veil down, it was forbidden for anyone to lift it, but she was free to do so if she chose. Jesus said, "Every one that looketh on a woman to lust after her hath committed adultery already with her in his heart" ([Matt. 5:28](#)). All these Scriptures indicate that women sometimes exposed their faces to view. Young girls were more apt to be veiled than married women.

The headgear of Bethlehem women is of interest in throwing light on Biblical customs. It was of two parts. First, there was what might be called a high cap on the front of which have been sewn rows of gold and silver coins. It would have to be a dire circumstance that would ever cause her to part with any of these coins. If she lost one of these, an evil meaning would be attached to the loss, and so it would be considered a great shame. Thus the woman whom Jesus told us about ([Luke 15:8-10](#)), had not merely lost a coin that could be used for buying articles, she had lost a part of that which was an ornament to her and which was also her dowry. Reflection was cast upon her character. Second, there was the veil, which was quite a large affair perhaps six feet long and some four feet wide, and so placed over the cap as to cover the entire headgear, with the exception of the coins. Most of these veils are made of heavy white linen. Some have embroidery work on them, and some are nearly covered with needlework.

Ornamentation

As a rule, Jewish men did not indulge in extravagances of dress, and there was little ornamentation among them. They often carried a cane or staff, which would be ornamented at the top, but it served the useful purpose of protecting them from half-wild dogs that abounded in he country, and was not much of an ornament. Certain men wore a ring on their right hand, or suspended by a cord or chain around the neck. Actually this was the *signet ring* or seal, and served as the personal signature of its owner, and so was not usually worn as an ornament. (For Scriptural examples of the ring, see ([Gen. 38:18](#); [Cant. 8:6](#); [Luke 15:22](#))

Among the women there was more apt to be ornamentation than among the men. Peter and Paul condemned an elaborate braiding of women's hair ([1Peter 3:3](#), A. R. V.; [1Tim. 2:9](#), A. R. V.), and the use of ornaments may possibly have been involved in the custom. Earrings were at one time worn by the women of Jacob's family ([Gen. 35:4](#)). And the golden earrings of the Israelitish women contributed to the making by Aaron of the golden calf ([Exod. 32:2](#)). These earrings as now worn in the East have as their main design the form of balls, long pendants, crescents, or disks. On behalf of his master, Abraham's servant had two bracelets ready to give Rebekah ([Gen. 24:22](#)). In recent years these are made of gold, silver, brass, or colored glass. In the third chapter of his prophecy, Isaiah lists many feminine ornaments. Necklaces or pendants are referred to also ([Isa. 3:19](#), A. R. V.). Today they take the form of balls, squares, or hollow cylinders. Anklets, now having bells and disks attached, are also mentioned in this chapter ([Isa. 3:18](#), A. R. V.). These are worn by Bedouin women today. Nosering also worn by these women were a part of Isaiah's list of feminine ornaments ([Isa. 3:21](#)). Amulets were worn in Isaiah's day ([Isa. 3:20](#), A. R. V.), and still are worn in the East as a charm to protect a person from various kinds of evil.

Special Dress Of The Pharisees

The Pharisees in their religious garb, took two articles of dress which were worn by other Jews and emphasized them in a special way until they became their distinctive apparel. One of these was the phylactery. It was a little box of metal, or bands of parchment, which was fastened to the hand or forehead by straps. It contained passages of Scripture referring to the Passover and the redemption of the first-born from Egypt. The custom was based on certain Scriptural admonitions ([Exod. 13:9, 16](#)). And the Jews still bind them upon their arms and foreheads.

The other special feature of the Pharisees' dress was the blue fringes placed at the corners of the mantle, as the law of Moses commanded ([Num. 15:37, 38](#); [Deut. 22:12](#)). The Pharisees had unusually broad phylacteries, and very long fringes ([Matt. 23:5](#)). It was for this proud use of these things without an appreciation of their value, that Jesus condemned them so severely.

The Dress Of Christ

How was Jesus Christ dressed? The famous artists, who have painted pictures of Him for us, have not always given an accurate view. One writer of the past century has attempted to describe His dress. It is worthy of careful study:

Upon His head He must always have worn the turban, the national headgear, used alike by rich and poor ... The turban He wore was probably white. It was fastened under the chin by a cord, and at the side fell down to the shoulders and over the tunic. Under His turban He wore His hair rather long, and His beard uncut. His tunic, the underneath vesture, was of one piece without seam, it was therefore of some value, and had probably been given Him by one of those women who "ministered to Him of their substance." Over this He wore the talith, loose and flowing. This mantle was not white, for we are told it became white during transfiguration. It was not red, for that was only the military color; it is possible it was blue, for blue was then very common; or it may have been simply white with brown stripes. In any case, Jesus had at the four corners of this mantle, the cicith ,i.e. fringe. . . . He wore sandals on His feet, as we learn from John the Baptist; and when He was traveling, going from place to place, He doubtless wore a girdle around the loins, and carried a stick in His hand.

CHAPTER 10

PARENTAL POSITION IN THE HOME

Position Of The Father

ORIENTAL MEANING attached to the word, "*father.*" The Oriental idea of the family is a little kingdom within itself, over which the father is supreme ruler. Every company of travelers, every tribe, every community, every family, must have "a father," who is the head of the group. A man is said to be "the father" of what he invents. Jubal "was the father of all such as handle the harp and pipe." Jabal was "the father of such as dwell in tents and have cattle" ([Gen. 4:20, 21](#)). Because he was a preserver and protector, Joseph said that God made him "a father to Pharaoh" ([Gen. 45:8](#)). The Oriental mind cannot conceive of any band or group without somebody being "the father" of it.

Supremacy Of The Father Under The Patriarchal System

Under the patriarchal administration, the father is supreme in command. This authority which the father has, extends to his wife, to his children, his children's children, his servants, and to all his household, and if he is the sheik, it extends to all the tribe. Many of the Bedouin Arabs of today are under no government except this patriarchal rule. When Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob lived in tents in the Land of Promise, they were ruled by this same system. And when the law of Moses was given to Israel, the authority of the parents, and especially the father, was still recognized. One of the Ten Commandments is "Honor thy father and thy mother" ([Exod. 20:12](#)). In many ways the father was the supreme court of appeal in domestic matters.

Succession Of Authority

In a majority of cases, the great authority which the father had, was handed down to his eldest son, who took over the position of leadership upon the death of the father. Thus Isaac became the new "sheik" over his father's household upon the death of Abraham. He and Rebekah had been living in that household under his father's authority; but the succession of authority passed on to him as the son. Ishmael, being son of the handmaid, did not succeed to the place ([Genesis 25](#)). In some cases, the father bestowed the succession of authority on other than the eldest son, as when Isaac bestowed it upon Jacob instead of Esau ([Genesis 27](#)).

Reverence Of The Children For The Father

Reverence of children for their parents, and especially the father, is well-nigh universal in the East down to modern times. Among the Arabs, it is very seldom that a son is heard of as being undutiful. It is quite customary for the child to greet the father in the morning by the kissing of his hand, and following this, to stand before him in an attitude of humility, ready to receive any order, or waiting for permission to depart. Following this, the child is often taken upon the lap of the father.

Obedience to parents was demanded by the Mosaic Law, and a rebellious and disobedient son

with the men, but follow at a respectful distance; the woman is, as a rule, kept closely confined, and watched with jealousy; when she goes out she is closely veiled from head to foot.

This attitude toward women can be illustrated from the Bible. Notice how Jacob's wives when traveling were given places by themselves, and not with him ([Genesis 32](#)). And nothing is said about the prodigal's mother being present at the feast which the father served his son ([Luke 15:11-32](#)). All this is in keeping with Oriental custom.

But while these things are true, it must be understood that the Old Testament does not picture the wife as a mere slave of her husband. She is seen to exert tremendous influence for good or ill over her husband. And he showed great respect for her in most cases. Sarah was treated by Abraham as a queen, and in matters of the household, she ruled in many ways. Abraham said to her, concerning Hagar, who had given birth to Ishmael, "Behold thy maid is in thy hand; do to her as it pleaseth thee" ([Gen. 16:6](#)). The tribute to a Hebrew wife and mother in the Book of Proverbs indicates she was a person of great influence with her husband: "The heart of her husband doth safely trust in her" ([Prov. 31:11](#)). "She openeth her mouth with wisdom" ([Prov. 31:26](#)). "Her children arise up and call her blessed; her husband also; and he praiseth her" ([Prov. 31:28](#)).

Position Of The Mother In Relation To The Children

Children in the East show nearly the same respect toward the mother as they do toward the father. The mother is believed to be entitled to honor and to have authority from God. Actually, the father and mother are looked at, as being the representatives of God in the matter of authority. They are considered as having this position no matter how poorly they fulfill their obligations. Hebrew children in general held their mothers in great respect, even when they became adults. This may be illustrated by the great influence exerted by queen mothers on the kings of Judah and Israel ([1Kings 2:19](#); [2Kings 11:1](#); [2Kings 24:12](#), etc.).

Position Of Jewish Women Superior To That Of Heathen Women

The degradation of women in the Orient is a matter of common knowledge. In many cases she is more like a drudge, or a slave, or a plaything for the man, than she is the man's companion, as in the West. This situation has been in existence for centuries. But the position of Hebrew women was far superior to that of heathen women, long before Christianity had its origin among them. Concerning this superiority in relation to the Arabs, Dr. Thomson testifies:

The position of women among them was far higher than with the Arabs, and the character of Hebrew women must have been, on the whole, such as to command and sustain this higher position. The Arabs can show no list of pious and illustrious ladies like those who adorn the history of the Hebrews. No Bedouin mother ever taught, or could teach, such a "prophecy" as King Lemuel learned from his; nor could the picture of "a virtuous woman," given in the last chapter of Proverbs, have been copied by an Arab. The conception by him of such a character was a moral impossibility.

CHAPTER 11

BIRTH AND CARE OF CHILDREN

Desire Of Jewish Women For Children

THERE WAS AMONG the Jewish wives a universal longing for, and joy in, the giving birth to children. That longing was well expressed in the words of Rachel to Jacob, "Give me children, or else I die" ([Gen. 30:1](#)). The Lord had originally said to Adam and Eve, "Be fruitful and multiply" ([Gen. 1:28](#)). And the promise to Abraham was, "I will make thy seed as the dust of the earth" ([Gen. 13:16](#)). The law of God taught that children were a sign of God's blessing: "Blessed shall be the fruit of thy body" ([Deut. 28:4](#)). The Psalmist pictured a man blessed of the Lord, and says of him, "Thy wife shall be as a fruitful vine by the sides of thine house" ([Psa. 128:3](#)). Sterility in marriage was considered to be a divine visitation or curse. Hannah's barrenness was "because the Lord had shut up her womb" ([1Sam. 1:6](#)). To have a child after being a long time barren, as was the case of Elisabeth, meant that the Lord had taken away her reproach among men ([Luke 1:25](#)).

Preference For Boy Babies

Among the Palestine Arabs there is always a desire on the part of the mothers and fathers that the baby shall be a boy rather than a girl. A parting blessing often used by the Arabs is:

Jewish Rites And Offerings At Birth Of A Child

Jewish boys were circumcised eight days after birth. The one who circumcised the child spoke the following words: "Blessed be the Lord our God, who has sanctified us by His precepts, and given us circumcision." Then the father of the boy would go on with these words: "Who has sanctified us by His precepts, and has granted us to introduce our child into the covenant of Abraham our father." Because it was said that God changed the names of Abraham and Sarah, at the time He gave the covenant of circumcision, therefore they would name the boy on the day he was circumcised. After doing this they had a family meal.

The rite of circumcision was the sign of the Abrahamic covenant. God had said to Abraham, "This is my covenant, which ye shall keep between me and you, and thy seed after thee" ([Gen. 17:10](#)). Jesus was circumcised the eighth day after birth and he was named "Jesus" at that time ([Luke 2:21](#)).

After childbirth, the Jewish mother passed through a period of purification of seven days for a boy and fourteen days for a girl, and then she still remained at home thirty-three days for a boy, and sixty-six days for a girl. Then she was to go up to the Temple to make her childbirth offerings. If she was rich she would bring a lamb to be offered, but if she was poor then she was allowed to present two young pigeons or a pair of turtledoves ([Luke 2:21](#); cf. [Leviticus 12](#)).

Naming Of Children

The Arabs are fond of compounding the name of Allah into the name given their children. It was a very common custom for the Hebrews to include a name for God as a part of their children's names.

A few samples of such Hebrew names are here given together with their meanings:

Abijah-"Whose father God is"
Ahaziah-"Held by Jehovah"
Azariah-"Helped by Jehovah"
Obadiah-"Servant of Jehovah"
Daniel-"God is my judge"
Elijah-"My God is Jehovah"
Elkanah-"Whom God created"
Ezekiel-"God will strengthen"

Another custom was practiced by Jews in naming their sons. After the birth of the first son, the father and mother were known as the father of so-and-so, and the mother of so-and-so. And the son added the father's first name after his own. Thus Jesus spoke of Peter as, "Simon Bar-jona" ([Matt. 16:17](#)), which means, "Simon, son of Jona." The Arabs giving such a name today would simply omit the word "son" and call the child "Simon Jona."

Sometimes Jews had double names in Christ's time. This was true of Thomas. John's Gospel refers to him as, "Thomas, which is called Didymus" ([John 11:16](#)). Both of these names mean "a twin." The name "Thomas" was Aramaic, and the name "Didymus" was Greek. When traveling in foreign countries, Jews often assumed a Greek, or Latin, or other name, which had a meaning similar to their own.

Jewish names given to girls, were often taken from beautiful objects in nature, or pleasant graces of character were used. "Bible examples are Jemima (dove), Tabitha or Dorcas (gazelle), Rhoda (rose), Rachel (lamb), Salome (peace), Deborah (bee), Esther (star)." Naomi told the Bethlehem women, "Call me not Naomi, call me Marah." Our Bible margins give the meanings of these names

thus: "Call me not, *Pleasant*, call me *Bitter*" ([Ruth 1:20](#)).

Duty Of Parents In Training Of Children

It is quite clear from the Scriptures that the mother did most of the training of the children in their earlier years. The Book of Proverbs speaks of "The words of King Lemuel, the prophecy that his mother taught him" ([Prov. 31:1](#)). And concerning Timothy, Paul said, "From a child thou hast known the holy scriptures" ([2Tim. 3:15](#)). Earlier in the epistle, Paul refers to the faith of Timothy's mother and grandmother ([2Tim, 1:5](#)). Young children then were taught by their mothers. The daughters, doubtless remained under the guidance and oversight of their mothers until their marriage. As the boys grew up, they were more and more taught by their fathers, although they would never get away from the mother's training altogether. Proverbs often refers to a father's instruction of his son. "My son, hear the instruction of thy father" ([Prov. 1:8](#)). "My son, keep thy father's commandment" ([Prov. 6:20](#)). Only in well-to-do families was instruction turned over to tutors. King Ahab had tutors for his many sons ([2Kings 10:1, 5](#)). Schools for training boys were not in operation until comparatively a late date for Jewish youth in the land.

CHAPTER 12

EDUCATION OF YOUTH

A STUDY OF EDUCATION in Bible lands from early to late Biblical days will have bearing on the manners and customs of the people, and will throw light on certain Bible passages.

Schools At Ur When Abraham Was A Boy

The archaeological expedition conducted by Sir Charles Leonard Woolley at Ur of the Chaldees, from 1922 to 1934, has proven that there were schools in the city of Abraham's youth. Clay tablets were uncovered that indicate some of the subjects taught in these schools. The pupils had writing lessons on tablets, and dictation lessons in vocabulary. In arithmetic, they had the multiplication and division tables, and more advanced scholars had square and cube roots, with lessons in practical geometry. Grammar lessons included paradigms of the conjugation of verbs. These revelations together with other discoveries at Ur, substantiate the view that Abraham came from a city of high civilization. No doubt he attended one of these schools.

It is certain that Abraham and Sarah were familiar with the laws of Hammurabi, having been taught this Babylonian law code from their youth. The explanation for Sarah's action in giving her maid Hagar to Abraham as a secondary wife ([Gen. 16](#)) is that the law of Hammurabi allowed such to be done. Similar action was repeated in Jacob's family relations ([Gen. 30](#)). But after the law of Moses came into being, this custom disappeared in Israel.

Schools In Egypt When Moses Was A Young Man

Stephen has given us the statement that Moses was "learned in all the wisdom of the Egyptians" ([Acts 7:22](#)). A wealth of information has come to us from the land of the Nile to let us know how valuable was the law-giver's education at the expense of Egypt.

Tradition has it that Moses went to school at the Temple of the Sun in Heliopolis. It was here then that he no doubt learned how to read and write. There is every indication that he had lessons in arithmetic, using duodecimal and decimal scales of notation. He must have studied geometry enough to make him familiar with the art of land-measuring. And his knowledge of mathematics would take in trigonometry. Astronomy was also studied by the Egyptians, as was architecture. The Egyptians had some proficiency in medical science and dentistry, and were acquainted with anatomy, chemistry, and had a knowledge of metals, for they had gold mines, and copper mines, and were familiar with the use of iron and the manufacture of bronze. Music was also an important subject in Egyptian schools. Moses must have been well educated according to the standards of ancient Egypt, which were of a high caliber.

Education Under The Law Of Moses

The duty of the educating of the youth was delegated by the Mosaic law especially to the Hebrew parents. The home was to be a school and the parents were to be teachers. The regulation read thus:

And these words, which I command thee this day, shall be in thine heart: and thou shalt teach them diligently unto thy children, and shalt talk of them when thou sittest in thine house, and when thou walkest by the way, and when thou liest down, and when thou risest up. And thou shalt bind them for a sign upon thine hand, and they shall be as frontlets between thine eyes. And thou shalt write them upon the posts of thy house, and on thy gates ([Deut. 6:6-9](#)).

The feasts of the law such as the Passover were designed to cause the young to ask the question: "What mean ye by this service?" ([Exod. 12:26](#)), and thus give the parents an opportunity to

explain its true meaning.

The Tabernacle, and later the Temple, were meant to be object lessons in divine truth. At each seventh year on the Feast of Tabernacles, the priests were to read the law before all the people. Thus the priests and Levites were also teachers in the land. And then an order of prophets arose, beginning with Moses, and continuing through a long and illustrious line, who were indeed valuable teachers of the youth of the land. Special schools for the training of young prophets were developed by them, as will be seen.

The Schools Of The Prophets

Because of the moral decline of the priesthood under Eli and his wicked sons, Samuel was led to form a school of the prophets, wherein young men, mostly Levites, were trained to teach the Law of God to the people. There was such a school at Ramah, over which Samuel presided, and David fled there for a time when Saul sought to kill him ([1Sam. 19:18-21](#)). There would seem to have been one at Gibeah where Samuel mentions "a company of prophets" ([1Sam. 10:5, 10](#),

A. R. V., margin). In the days of Elijah and Elisha, reference is made to "the sons of the prophets" ([1Kings 20:35](#)), as living together at Gilgal, Bethel, and Jericho ([2Kings 2:1, 3, 5; 2Kings 4:38](#)). About one hundred prophets ate with Elisha at Gilgal ([2Kings 4:38-44](#)). There may have been that many at Jericho, for mention is made of "fifty men of the sons of the prophets" ([2Kings 2:7](#)) that went to hunt for the body of Elijah. These schools were no doubt for the study of the law and history of Israel, and also the cultivation of sacred music and poetry. The writing of sacred history came to be an important part of the labor of the prophets. These young men were given mental and spiritual training in order that they might be able to exert a greater influence for good upon the people of their day.

The Synagogue Schools When Jesus Was A Boy

When Jesus grew up as a boy in the village of Nazareth, he no doubt attended the synagogue school. The Jewish child was sent to this school in the fifth or sixth year of his life. The pupils either "stood, teacher and pupils alike, or else sat on the ground in a semicircle, facing the teacher." Until the children were ten years of age, the Bible was the one textbook. From ten to fifteen the traditional law was the main subject dealt with, and a study of theology as taught in the Talmud was taken up with those over fifteen years of age. The study of the Bible began with the Book of Leviticus, continued with other parts of the Pentateuch, and then went on with the Prophets, and lastly, the Writings. Because of the remarkable familiarity of Jesus with the Holy Scriptures, we may be fairly certain that His home in Nazareth had in it a copy of the Sacred Book as a whole. Doubtless He loved to ponder its pages at home after having studied its teachings in the school.

The Rabbinical School Of Paul's Day

In the times of Paul, there were two rival schools of rabbinical theology, the school of Hillel which he attended at Jerusalem, and the school of Shammai. The former was the more liberal school as we would think of it today, and placed tremendous emphasis upon Jewish oral traditions. As a young man of thirteen years of age, Saul of Tarsus came to Jerusalem to begin his training under the great leader, Gamaliel. He graduated from this school to become a typical Pharisaical rabbi. Concerning his training he himself said: "I am verily a man which am a Jew, born in Tarsus, a city in Cilicia, yet brought up in this city at the feet of Gamaliel, and taught according to the perfect manner of the law of the fathers" ([Acts 22:3](#)).

The training of Jesus as a boy had been under the other school, where there was less stress upon tradition, and more upon spiritual teachings of the law and the prophets. In his unconverted days, how Saul would have resented what Jesus said to the Pharisees, "Why do ye also transgress the commandment of God by your tradition?" and, "Thus have ye made the commandment of God of

none effect by your tradition"! ([Matt. 15:3, 6](#))

The Roman Schools Of The First Century

It is now known that there were twenty grammar schools in the great city of Rome when the Apostle Paul first visited the city. Girls as well as boys were allowed to go to school, but there is evidence that more boys than girls availed themselves of the privilege.

Paul's reference to the "schoolmaster" ([Gal. 3:24](#)) of these Roman schools, was formerly misunderstood by many, until papyri writings threw light on his meaning. The individual called in our translation "schoolmaster" was actually not the headmaster or teacher, but rather a faithful slave whose duty it was to conduct his master's sons to and from school and prevent them from getting into mischief. Paul was comparing Christ with the real teacher, and the law was like the slave whose duty it was to conduct the pupil to the teacher.

Discoveries of the archaeologists at Ephesus indicate that the School of Tyrannus that Paul engaged as a hall in which to preach ([Acts 19:9](#)) was probably an elementary school, where the teacher taught for a few hours early in the morning and for a while in the afternoon. Thus the room would be available for Paul's use when he wanted it. Such schoolrooms were usually adjacent to a street and thus would suit his purpose admirably.

CHAPTER 13

RELIGION IN THE HOME

The Father As Priest In Patriarchal Times

IN THE DAYS of the early patriarchs, the father was the priest for the whole family, and this honor and responsibility of exercising the priesthood usually was bestowed upon the first-born son upon the death of the father. This practice continued until the law of Moses transferred this right to the tribe of Levi, which tribe then furnished the priests to Israel as a nation.

The Altar

The religion in the homes of those early days largely centered about an altar upon which animal sacrifices were offered unto God. Thus when Abraham came into the land and had pitched his tent in the vicinity of Bethel, the Scriptural record says of him, "And there he builded an altar unto the Lord, and called upon the name of the Lord" ([Gen. 12:8](#)). Later on it is recorded that he built an altar at Hebron ([Gen. 13:18](#)). It is said that Jacob built one at Shechem ([Gen. 33:18-20](#)). And then in obedience to the command of the Lord, he went to Bethel, and like his grandfather, built an altar to the Lord there. Anticipating doing this, he said to his family, "Let us arise, and go up to Bethel; and I will make there an altar unto God, who answered me in the day of my distress, and was with me in the way which I went" ([Gen. 35:3](#)). The altar in the home life of those early days helped to produce a sense of sin, a realization of God's holiness, and a knowledge that the way of approach to God was through a sacrifice. The altar was the forerunner of the family prayer life in a Christian home today, which is based upon forgiveness of sin through the blood of Christ, of which the animal sacrifice was a symbol.

The Teraphim

In the land of Babylonia, from which Abraham had originally come, there was family worship of household gods, and the home had its altar along with clay figurines of these gods, which were called "teraphim." These family gods served as guardian angels of the home. At the death of a father, these household gods, or teraphim, would often be left to the oldest son, with the understanding that others of the family would have the right to worship them.

When Jacob left the home of Laban in Haran, Genesis says, "Rachel stole the teraphim that were her father's" ([Gen. 31:19](#), A. R. V.). Laban was very much agitated over this theft. He pursued Jacob's party and said to him, "Wherefore hast thou stolen my gods?" ([Gen. 31:30](#)). But why was Laban so concerned about discovering those lost teraphim? Sir Charles Leonard Woolley, in charge of excavations at Ur of the Chaldees, tells of a tablet of that region which reveals a law that throws light on Rachel's theft. Dr. Woolley puts the law thus: "The possession of the household gods conferred the privilege of primogeniture.", Thus Rachel must have stolen her brother's birthright when she took her father's teraphim, and she was thereby seeking to make Jacob the legal heir to the wealth of Laban . This ancient form of idolatry was vitally linked to family affairs. It would seem that Rachel brought forth those stolen teraphim when the family was about to move from Shechem to Bethel. Jacob said to his family at that time, "Put away the foreign gods that are among you and purify yourselves" ([Gen. 35:2](#), A. R. V.). The presence of these relics of former days would indicate an effort to combine the superstitions and heathen charms of an idolatrous worship along with the worship of the true and living God. The teraphim appeared on several occasions in later history of the Israelites.

Religious Education Under The Law

The law of Moses was very definite in its requirement that parents must train their children in the knowledge of God and His laws. Concerning these divine precepts it said: "Teach them thy sons, and thy sons' sons" ([Deut. 4:9](#)). Concerning the carrying out of this commandment, one writer has

said: "Religious education in the family became, as it has continued, a special mark of Judaism." It became the very solemn duty of Hebrew parents to teach their children the commandments of the law, and also to explain to them the real meaning of the religious observances. No doubt it has been this emphasis upon religious education in the family Which has contributed so largely to the permanence of the Jew in history. And it is also true that any failure of the Jews to fulfill their God-given mission in the world may be traced in part at least to their failure in family religious training.

Family Pilgrimages To The Sanctuary

A very important part of Hebrew family life was the pilgrimage made to the place of the sanctuary. "Thrice in the year shall all your men children appear before the Lord God, the God of Israel" ([Exod. 34:23](#)). The whole family could go, but the male members were required to go on this pilgrimage. The feasts of the Lord came at these three seasons of the year. The element of thanksgiving was largely emphasized in most of them. The Lord made a special promise to those going on such a pilgrimage to God's house. "Neither shall any man desire thy land, when thou shalt go up to appear before the Lord" ([Exod. 34:24](#)). With so many of the men folks gone from their homes, God promised to look after these homes against any possible attack from an enemy while the family was away on this pilgrimage.

The family of Elkanah was in the habit of making such pilgrimages. "And this man went up out of his city yearly to worship and to sacrifice unto the Lord God of hosts in Shiloh" ([1Sam. 1:3](#)). It was while on such a pilgrimage that Hannah prayed for a baby boy, and in due time Samuel was born.

The most famous example of a family pilgrimage to Jerusalem is of course that of Joseph, Mary, and Jesus. Luke reports it: "Now his parents went to Jerusalem every year at the feast of the passover. And when he was twelve years old, they went up to Jerusalem after the custom of the feast" ([Luke 2:41-42](#)). We can scarcely imagine how much that trip to the Holy City must have meant to the boy Jesus. The journey alone would be thrilling to any child, but to Jesus it was being in his Father's House that gave him the biggest thrill of all ([Luke 2:49](#), A. R. V.).

Some Bible readers have been perplexed because Luke says that Joseph and Mary went a day's journey before discovering that Jesus was absent from them. But the present-day Syrian customs of family religious pilgrimages throw light on what actually took place. Luke says: "They sought him among their kinsfolk and acquaintance" ([Luke 2:44](#)). On such pilgrimages, kinsfolk and acquaintances travel together in large groups, and the young people of the party are considered to be perfectly safe as long as they are with this group. On these trips parents often go for hours at a time without seeing their sons. It is quite probable that Jesus was with the caravan when it started out, and then was detached from his kinsfolk and returned to the city and to the temple.

The Bible In The Jewish Home Of Christ's Time

In the days when Jesus grew up as a boy in his Nazareth home, whatever else of the Hebrew Scriptures the youth may have been acquainted with, they grew up to hear recited a prayer called "The Shema." This prayer was in reality the quotation of three passages from the Pentateuch. It was repeated morning and evening by the men. And Jewish boys when they became twelve years of age had to be able to repeat this prayer. The three Scriptures that made up the Shema were:

[Deuteronomy 6:4-9](#); [Deuteronomy 11:13-21](#); and [Numbers 15:37-41](#). It is quite likely that after Jesus returned from that pilgrimage to Jerusalem, He would borrow the manuscript from the synagogue of Nazareth (if He did not have a copy of the Scriptures in His own home) and study in it, especially the books of Moses and the prophets. In His teachings He often referred to these writers, and was especially fond of Isaiah and Jeremiah .

The widespread use of the Shema in Christ's time became with many a mere form with little or no meaning. It was possible for this prayer to become as vain as a heathen prayer. Doubtless Christ was protesting such use of it when He said, "In praying use not vain repetitions, as the Gentiles do" ([Matt. 6:7](#), A. R. V.) The practice of the phylactery, which the Pharisees made such wide use of, was based on some of the Scripture in the Shema, and as used by them, was condemned by Jesus.

Entertaining Fellow-believers In New Testament Times

In the days of the apostles, great importance was attached to the religious duty of believers entertaining fellow believers who came to their town. In time of persecution, such hospitality would be of great value. Luke tells of one such time of persecution thus: "Therefore they that were scattered abroad went everywhere preaching the word" ([Acts 8:4](#)). How welcome a Christian home of refuge would be to one who had to flee from his home because of his testimony for Christ! The Apostle Paul stayed in the home of Aquila and Priscilla, while he carried on his missionary work in Corinth ([Acts 18:1-3](#)). One of the qualifications of a good bishop Paul gave in the words "given to hospitality" ([1Tim. 3:2](#)). And to laymen he stressed the importance of being "given to hospitality" ([Rom. 12:13](#)). Peter told the saints, "Use hospitality one to another without grudging" ([1Pet. 4:9](#)). The word translated *hospitality* here means "friendly to strangers." Peter was not thinking of believers entertaining their Christian friends, but rather of their entertaining traveling Christians who were in need of food and shelter. The hospitality among the early Christians promoted Christian fellowship, and thus strengthened growth in the faith. It must have exerted a great influence upon the youth growing up in the homes where it was practiced. See also [The Sacred Duty Of Hospitality](#).

Christian Gatherings In The Home

The early gathering place for Christian worship was in the home. The earliest excavation of a church by archaeologists, where a date has been ascertained, is of a room within a house that was set apart for worship, and was thus furnished as a chapel. It dates back to the third century A. D. It seems difficult for the twentieth century Christians to realize that most, if not all, of the earliest churches met in homes. Dr. A. T. Robertson lists some of those early gathering places:

The church in Jerusalem met in the house of Mary ([Acts 12:12](#)), at Philippi in the house of Lydia ([Acts 16:40](#)), at Ephesus in the house of Aquila and Priscilla ([1Cor. 16:19](#)), and later in Rome ([Rom. 16:5](#)), and likewise there was the church that met in the house of Philemon in Colossae apparently ([Philem. 1:2](#)). The homes surely received a special blessing from that service. There was responsibility also.

CHAPTER 14

MARRIAGE CUSTOMS

Polygamy In Old Testament Times

THE MOSAIC LAW allowed polygamy among the Hebrew people. Wives were given certain protections against abuses, and there were various regulations regarding such marriages. There was, however, among the Israelites, a marked tendency toward monogamy. No doubt the main reason for this was that the custom of more than one wife was too expensive for most of the people.

The law did forbid the multiplication of wives by the kings of Israel ([Deut. 17:17](#)). The cause of much of the trouble, in the lives of David and Solomon, as well as Ahab, was because of their following the example of the kings of their day in taking many, and especially heathen wives, rather than obeying God's law.

Old Testament influence in favor of monogamy is seen in two ways. First, pictures are painted of unhappy homes because of more than one wife in them. Trouble between rival wives, as in the case of Leah and Rachel ([Genesis 30](#)) and also Hannah and Peninnah ([1Sam. 1:1-6](#)) argues strongly in favor of monogamy. Second, monogamy among religious leaders and certain outstanding characters, sets the right example for the masses. Men like Adam, Noah, Isaac, Joseph,

Moses, and Job, had but one wife. Also the high priest ([Lev. 21:14](#)), and the prophets were, as far as we know, monogamous.

Divorce In Old Testament Times

For centuries it has been possible for a husband in Arab lands, to divorce his wife by a spoken word. The wife thus divorced is entitled to all her wearing apparel, and the husband cannot take from her anything she has upon her own person. For this reason, coins on the headgear, and rings and necklaces, become important wealth in the hour of the divorced woman's great need. This is one reason why there is so much interest in the bride's personal adornment in Eastern countries. Such customs of divorce were no doubt prevalent in Gentile lands in Old Testament times. It was for this reason that the Law of Moses limited the power of the husband to divorce his wife, by requiring that he must give her a *written* bill of divorce ([Deut. 24:1](#)). Thus the Jewish custom of divorce was superior to the Arabic.

It is important to remember that the sin of adultery did not have anything to do with the matter of divorce under the Jewish law. That sin was punishable by death ([Lev. 20:10](#); [Deut. 22:22](#)), and that by stoning. If a husband found any unseemly thing in his wife, he could give her a written bill of divorce, which made it possible for her to marry another man ([Deut. 24:2](#)). A man guilty of unfaithfulness was considered to be a criminal only in that he had invaded the rights of another man. A woman was not allowed to divorce her husband. The prophet Malachi taught that God hated "putting away," and condemned severely any man who dealt treacherously with the wife of his covenant ([Mal. 2:14-16](#)). Such was the attitude of the Hebrew people on the subject of divorce. The Lord Jesus swept away all grounds for divorce under the Law, and made unfaithfulness the lone grounds for divorce under the Christian dispensation ([Matt. 5:31, 32](#)).

Choice Of A Wife The Parents' Prerogative

It is well known that in the East the parents of a young man select a bride for him. This custom goes back to early Old Testament times. When Esau married against the wishes of his parents, he caused ill-favor ([Gen. 26:34, 35](#)).

Reason For This Parental Privilege

Why did parents usually insist on their right to select a bride for their son? The new bride was to become a member of the bridegroom's clan, and therefore, the whole family was interested in knowing, if she would be suitable. There is evidence that at least sometimes the son or daughter was consulted. Rebekah was asked if she was willing to go and become the wife of Isaac ([Gen. 24:58](#)). But the parents felt they had a right to make the choice.

Love After Marriage

Orientals look at the love between husband and wife very much as Occidentals would look at love between a brother and a sister. It is indicated that the former should love each other because God chose them for each other. Orientals would say that husband and wife love each other, because God through the parents, selected them for each other. In other words, the usual Oriental idea is that love comes after marriage. When Isaac and Rebekah were married, they had never seen each other before. Yet the Sacred Record says, "Isaac brought her into his mother's tent, and took Rebekah, and she became his wife; and he loved her" ([Gen. 24:67](#)).

Love Before Marriage

Although it is true that most Oriental couples have no opportunity for love before marriage, yet the Bible gives some examples of that sort of love, that are worthy of note. The case of Jacob and Rachel is the most noted illustration of this. With him it was love at first sight ([Gen. 29:10-18](#)). Genesis describes his love for her with these memorable words: "And Jacob served seven years for Rachel; and they seemed unto him but a few days, for the love he had to her" ([verse 20](#)). Other examples of love before marriage would include Samson who loved "a woman in Timnath of the daughters of the Philistines" ([Judges 14:2](#)), and "Michal, Saul's daughter, who loved David," and afterwards became his wife ([1Sam. 18:20](#)).

Conducting Negotiations To Secure A Wife

The customs of the Arabs in certain sections of Bible lands when they negotiate to secure a bride for their son, illustrate in many respects Biblical practices. If a young man has acquired sufficient means to make it possible for him to provide a marriage dowry, then his parents select the girl and the negotiations begin. The father calls in a man who acts as a deputy for him and the son. This deputy is called, "the friend of the bridegroom" by John the Baptist ([John 3:29](#)). This man is fully informed as to the dowry the young man is willing to pay for his bride. Then, together with the young man's father, or some other male relative, or both, he goes to the home of the young woman. The father announces that the deputy will speak for the party, and then the bride's father will appoint a deputy to

represent him. Before the negotiations begin, a drink of coffee is offered the visiting group, but they refuse to drink until the mission is completed. Thus Abraham's servant, when offered food by the parents of Rebekah, said, "I will not eat, until I have told mine errand" ([Gen. 24:33](#)). When the two deputies face each other, then the negotiations begin in earnest. There must be consent for the hand of the young woman and agreement on the amount of dowry to be paid for her. When these are agreed upon, the deputies rise and their congratulations are exchanged, and then coffee is brought in, and they all drink of it as a seal of the covenant thus entered into.

The Marriage Dowry

Reason For Dowry For Bride's Family

In the Orient, when the bride's parents give their daughter in marriage, they are actually diminishing the efficiency of their family. Often unmarried daughters would tend the flock of their father ([Exod. 2:16](#)), or they would work in the field, or render help in other ways. Thus upon her marriage, a young woman would be thought of as increasing the efficiency of her husband's family and diminishing that of her parents. Therefore, a young man who expects to get possession of their daughter must be able to offer some sort of adequate compensation. This compensation was the marriage "dowry."

It was not always required that the dowry be paid in cash, it could be paid in service. Because Jacob could not pay cash, he said, "I will serve thee seven years for Rachel" ([Gen. 29:18](#)). King Saul required the lives of one hundred of the enemy Philistines as dowry for David to secure Michal as his wife ([1Sam. 18:25](#)).

Reason For Dowry For The Bride Herself

It was usually customary for at least some of the price of the dowry to be given to the bride. This would be in addition to any personal gift from the bride's parents. Leah and Rachel complained about the stinginess of their father Laban. Concerning him they said, "He hath sold us, and hath also quite devoured the price paid for us" ([Gen. 31:15](#), A. R. V. margin). Laban had had the benefit of Jacob's fourteen years of service, without making the equivalent of at least part of it as a gift to Leah and Rachel.

Since a divorced wife in the Orient is entitled to all her wearing apparel, for this reason much of her personal dowry consists of coins on her headgear, or jewelry on her person. This becomes wealth to her in case her marriage ends in failure. This is why the dowry is so important to the bride, and such emphasis is placed upon it in the negotiations that precede marriage. The woman who had ten pieces of silver and lost one was greatly concerned over the loss, because it was doubtless a part of her marriage dowry ([Luke 15:8, 9](#)).

Special Dowry From The Bride's Father

It was customary for fathers who could afford to do so to give their daughters a special marriage dowry. When Rebekah left her father's house to be the bride of Isaac, her father gave her a nurse and also damsels who were to be her attendants ([Gen. 24:59, 61](#)). And Caleb gave to his daughter a dowry of a field with springs of water ([Judges 1:15](#)). Such was sometimes the custom in olden times.

The Betrothal

Difference Between A Promise And A Betrothal

A promise of marriage among the Jews of Bible times might mean an engagement without anything definite. There could be a number of engagements broken off. It was the betrothal that was binding, rather than a mere promise of marriage. The promise might be set aside, but a betrothal entered into was considered as final.

The Betrothal A Covenant

Among the ancient Hebrews the betrothal was a spoken covenant. Ezekiel pictures God as marrying Jerusalem, and the following words are used of her: "I swear unto thee, and entered into a covenant with thee, saith the Lord God, and thou becamest mine" ([Ezek. 16:8](#)). After the exile, the betrothal included signing a written document of marriage.

The Ceremony Of Betrothal

The Jewish betrothal in Christ's time was conducted thus: The families of the bride and groom met, with some others present to serve as witnesses. The young man would give the young woman either a gold ring, or some article of value, or simply a document in which he promised to marry her. Then he would say to her: "See by this ring [or this token] thou art set apart for me, according to the law of Moses and of Israel."

Difference Between Betrothal And Marriage

The betrothal was not the same as the wedding. At least a whole year elapsed between the betrothal and the actual wedding. These two events must not be confused. The Law said, "What man is there that hath betrothed a wife, and hath not taken her?" ([Deut. 20:7](#)). Two events are differentiated here: betrothing a wife, and taking a wife, i.e., in actual marriage. It was during this period of about a year, between the betrothal and the wedding, that Mary was found to be with child of the Holy Spirit ([Matt. 7:18](#), A. R. V.).

The Apparel Of Groom And Bride

When the night arrived for the wedding festivities to begin, and it was time to go for the bride, *the groom* was dressed as much like a king as possible. If he were rich enough to afford it, he wore a gold crown. Otherwise it would be a garland of fresh flowers. His garments would be scented with frankincense and myrrh, his girdle would be a silken one brilliantly colored, his sandals would be figured and carefully laced, and all of this would give effect to the "flowing drapery of the loose robes and to the graceful bearing peculiar to the lands of the East. For the time, the peasant seemed a prince among his fellows, and all paid him the deference due to exalted rank." This preparation of the groom for the wedding has been aptly described in the prophecy of Isaiah, "He hath clothed me with the garments of salvation, he hath covered me with the robe of righteousness, as a bridegroom decketh himself with ornaments" ([Isa. 61:10](#)).

The adorning of *the bride*, was a very costly and elaborate affair. Much time was given to the preparation of her person. Every effort was put forth to make her complexion glossy and shining with a luster like unto marble. The words of David must have been their ideal for her: "that our daughters may be as corner stones, polished after the similitude of a palace" ([Psa. 144:12](#)). Her dark locks of hair were often braided with gold and pearls. She was decked with all the precious stones and jewels that the family had inherited from previous

generations. Those who were too poor to afford much themselves would borrow what they could from their friends.

The wedding festivities, and especially the bride's adornment, would always be remembered by her. The prophet Jeremiah made reference to this thought, "Can a maid forget her ornaments, or a bride her attire?" ([Jer. 2:32](#)). The Apostle John saw New Jerusalem "prepared as a bride adorned for her husband" ([Rev. 21:2](#)).

Going Of The Groom To Get The Bride

Sometimes the bride's relations would conduct her from her father's house to the house of her fiancé, where her new home was to be. But more often, as was the case of the Ten Virgins in Christ's parable, the bridegroom himself went in person to bring her to his home for the wedding festivities to take place there. Before leaving the house that had been her home, she would receive the blessing of her relatives. Thus Rebekah's relatives sent her away with a typical Oriental marriage blessing, "Thou art our sister, be thou the mother of thousands of millions, and let thy seed possess the gate of those which hate them" ([Gen. 24:60](#)). The bride left her father's house adorned and perfumed, and with a crown on her head. Ezekiel's description of the bride is very appropriate, "I decked thee also with ornaments, and I put bracelets upon thy hands, and a chain on thy neck. And I put a jewel on thy forehead, and earrings in thine ears, and a beautiful crown upon thine head" ([Ezek. 16:11, 12](#)).

The Wedding Procession

The bridegroom set out with the bride from the house of her parents, and there followed a grand procession all the way to his house. The streets of Asiatic cities were dark, and it was necessary that anybody venturing forth at night should carry a lamp or torch (cf. [Psa. 119:105](#)). Those invited guests, who did not go to the bride's home were allowed to join the procession along the way, and go with the whole group to the marriage feast. Without a torch or lamp they couldn't join the procession, or enter the bridegroom's house.

The Ten Virgins waited for the procession to arrive at the point where they were waiting; and five wise ones were able to proceed because they had a reserve supply of oil for their lamps; but the foolish virgins lacked that oil and so, not being ready, they were barred from the wedding feast ([Matt. 25:11](#)).

The lamps carried by these virgins have been described by Dr. Edersheim:

The lamps consisted of a round receptacle for pitch or oil for the wick. This was placed in a hollow cup or deep saucer, . . . which was fastened by a pointed end into a long wooden pole, on which it was borne a loft.

In going from the bride's house to the groom's house, the bride allowed her hair to be loose and flowing, and she had her face veiled. Some of her own relations preceded her in the procession, and scattered ears of parched grain to the children along the way. There were demonstrations of joy all along the road to the destination. Part of the procession included men who played on drums or other musical instruments. And there was dancing along the way. One of the punishments Jeremiah predicted for the Jews, because of their sins, was the taking away of wedding joys. "Then will I cause to cease from the cities of Judah, and from the streets of Jerusalem, the voice of mirth, and the voice of gladness, the voice of the bridegroom, and the voice of the bride" ([Jer. 7:34](#)).

Arrival At The House Of The Bridegroom



Oriental Bride

Oriental Bride

Picture:

The most important moment of the entire marriage festivity was that in which the bride entered her new home. And as both groom and bride usually wore crowns, the Psalmist must have pictured this important moment in the marriage of the king:

She shall be brought unto the king in raiment of needle-work: the virgins her companions that follow her shall be brought unto thee. With gladness and rejoicing shall they be brought: they shall enter into the king's palace ([Psa. 45:14-15](#)).

After arriving at the bridegroom's house, some of the older women had the task of arranging the bride's hair. Her flowing locks were hidden beneath a thick veil. From this time on, the custom would dictate that her face was not to be unveiled in public. She was led to her place under a canopy, which was located either inside the house, or if the weather permitted, in the open air. Her place was beside her husband, where both would hear new words of benediction given by one of the fathers, or by some important person who might be present. In the wedding at Cana of Galilee, Jesus was the most prominent guest present, and doubtless He was asked to pronounce His benediction upon the newlyweds ([John 2:1-11](#)).

The Wedding Feast

Every guest that attended the feast was required to wear a wedding garment ([Matt. 22:12](#)). The wedding banquet was presided over by the ruler of the feast ([John 2:8, 9](#)). It was his duty to take care of the preparations, and during the feast he would get around among the guests, and see to it that they lacked nothing. He instructed servants in carrying out all the necessary details. The expression, "children of the bridechamber" ([Matt. 9:15](#)), used by Jesus, simply means the guests at the wedding. The governor or ruler of the feast returned thanks at the dinner and pronounced benedictions at appointed times. He also blessed the wine. It was customary to tell riddles at these feasts like Samson did at his wedding ([Judges 14:12-18](#)). During the meal mirthfulness prevailed, and the guests were expected to exalt the bride.

There was no religious ceremony at the feast. In place of this were the benedictions of relatives and friends. The benediction of

those who witnessed wedding arrangements for Ruth and Boaz is a good example of what would be included in such a benediction ([Ruth 4:11](#)). It corresponds to the well wishing of Western wedding guests. After the wedding feast was over the husband was escorted by his friends into the apartment where his wife had previously been conducted. These wedding festivities with relatives and friends lasted for a whole week (cf. [Judges 14:17](#)), but the entire number of what was called "the days of the marriage" was thirty.

CHAPTER 15

SOME SPECIAL EVENTS OF DOMESTIC FESTIVITY

Dedication Of A Newly Built House

THAT WERE WAS a generally accepted custom among the Jews of dedicating a newly constructed dwelling is indicated from the words of the Mosaic Law: "What man is there that hath built a new house and hath not dedicated it" ([Deut. 20:5](#)). No doubt the social and also the devotional elements entered into the occasion. A similar custom was in use in other ancient and in some modern lands of the East.

The title of the Thirtieth Psalm reads, "A Psalm; Song at the dedication of the house of David." This would seem to reveal that David celebrated the entering into his house with a special service or festivity of dedication. Spurgeon quotes Samuel Chandler as saying concerning this custom:

It was common when any person had finished a house and entered into it, to celebrate it with great rejoicing, and keep a festival, to which his friends are invited, and to perform some religious ceremonies, to secure the protection of Heaven.

Weaning Of A Child

The weaning of a child is an important event in the domestic life of the East. In many places it is celebrated by a festive gathering of friends, by feasting, by religious ceremonies, and sometimes the formal presentation of rice to the child.

Among the peasant Arabs of Palestine, babies are often nursed for two years, and sometimes for four or even five years. When it is being weaned, various dainties are given the child to sweeten the gums and make it to forget the mother's milk (cf. [Psa. 131:2](#))

festivity in the ancient Hebrew home. It was at a sheep-shearing time that the affair between David and wealthy Nabal took place ([1Sam. 25:4](#)). Concerning Nabal's celebration Scripture says: "And Abigail came to Nabal; and, behold, he held a feast in his home, like the feast of a king" ([1Sam. 25:36](#)). The other example is the sheep-shearing feast of Absalom, at which time the murder of Ammon was perpetrated ([2Sam. 13:23](#) f.). These two examples of this sort of a feast would not by themselves indicate that it was anything but a time of festivity alone. But without doubt, in many pious homes it was a time of thanksgiving to God for the wool provided from the flocks.

CHAPTER 16

SICKNESS IN BIBLE LANDS

Old Testament Teaching On Health And Sickness

PROMISES OF HEALTH through obedience to the law. Through their wilderness experiences and after they were in the Land of Promise, the Hebrew families could look to the promise God originally gave to them about health for their bodies:

If thou wilt diligently hearken to the voice of the Lord thy God, and wilt do that which is right in his sight, and wilt give ear to his commandments, and keep all his statutes, I will put none of these diseases upon thee which I have brought upon the Egyptians, for I am the Lord that healeth thee ([Exod. 15:26](#)).

Health was promised upon condition of obedience to the law of God.

Sickness As Punishment For Disobedience

The law also taught Israel that sickness could be expected when God's law was disobeyed. The twenty-eighth chapter of the Book of Deuteronomy lists many curses that would come upon the people of Israel because of disobedience. Among them are these:

He will bring upon thee all the diseases of Egypt, which thou wast afraid of; and they shall cleave unto thee. Also every sickness, and every plague, which is not written in the book of this law, them will the Lord bring upon thee, until thou be destroyed ([Deut. 28:60, 61](#)).

The families of Israel who were acquainted with the Hebrew Bible would be brought up on the idea that health was the reward for obedience, and sickness the punishment for disobedience.

What Old Testament Jews Did In Time Of Sickness

Ordinarily, the ancient Hebrews did not go to physicians when they were sick. There are surprisingly few references to physicians in Old Testament days. Job mentions the existence of such when he says, "Ye are all physicians of no value" ([Job 13:4](#)). King Asa was criticized by the sacred writer who says of him, "He sought not to the Lord, but to the physicians" ([2Chron. 16:12](#)). The prophet Jeremiah asked the question, "Is there no balm in Gilead; is there no physician there?" ([Jer. 8:22](#)). It is quite probable, that any physicians referred to in these days were foreigners, and not Jews of the land.

There are many examples of prayer to God for healing of sickness under the dispensation of law. Moses prayed for the healing of the Israelites bitten by the snakes ([Num. 21:7](#)). The Sixth Psalm is David's prayer in time of sickness, and one which God heard. One of the great thanksgiving Psalms has a section in it dealing with gratitude to God for healing of the sick ([Psa. 107:17-21](#)). King Solomon in his dedicatory prayer for the temple, encouraged the people to expect God to answer their prayer for healing of sickness ([2Chron. 6:28-30](#)). And King Hezekiah was healed in answer to prayer ([2Kings 20](#)).

Jewish Attitude Toward Sickness In Christ's Time

The Jews of that day were largely lacking in a scientific knowledge of medicine. This fact may be accounted for in their belief that sickness was caused by either the sin of the sick person, or of his relations, and that it was sent as punishment for that sin. Concerning the blind man, the disciples asked Jesus, "Master, who did sin, this man, or his parents, that he was born blind?" ([John 9:2](#)). Also, sickness was usually attributed to demons. Therefore, they considered that the cure was the casting out these evil spirits. Among them, it was the most pious rather than the most educated man

who would have this power. Jesus referred to this practice when the Pharisees wrongly accused him: "If I by Beelzebub cast out demons, by whom do your sons cast them out?" ([Matt. 12:27](#), A. R. V.) These facts explain the Jewish lack of medical knowledge in those days.

Mark adds an interesting fact in his report of Christ healing the woman with the issue of blood. He says that she "had suffered many things of many physicians" ([Mark 5:26](#)). One writer quotes the Talmud of Babylon as authority for the fact that some of the rabbis themselves posed as physicians, and very queer remedies indeed were prescribed by them for a woman with this ailment. If one course of procedure did not succeed in healing, another one was suggested. One of these was this:

Dig seven pits, and burn in them some vine branches not yet four years old. Then let the woman, carrying a cup of wine in her hand, come up to each pit in succession, and sit down by the side of it, and each time let the words be repeated: "Be free from thy sickness."

Prevalence Of Sickness In Palestine In Christ's Day And In Modern Times

The Gospel records tell of the presence of a multitude of sick people in the land, and how these were brought in great numbers to Jesus to be healed. "And at even . . . they brought unto him all that were diseased . . . and all the city was gathered at the door. And he healed many that were sick of divers diseases" ([Mark 1:32-34](#)). In the days before the British occupation of the land, and before the modern Jews brought scientific medical skill in the healing, of disease, the Land of Israel was overrun with all kinds of afflicted people. One traveling through the land would scarcely ever be out of sight of blind beggars, or crippled people, or lepers, etc. Such a situation has served to illustrate the conditions under which the ministry of Christ was carried on so effectively, in meeting the need in the homes where sickness was present.

Expectation Of Supernatural Power To Heal By A Representative Of God

Dr. Trumbull has called attention to a very interesting situation which he discovered in the Orient. He says:

Another fact that sheds light upon the work of Jesus and His disciples in their ministry of healing, is the universal expectation, in the East, of the cure of disease through the supernatural power of some reputed representative of God. So it is, and so it has been.

A multitude of people lay about the pool of Bethesda expecting an angel to trouble the waters and cure their sicknesses ([John 5:1-4](#)). A blind beggar was given an orange and a crust of bread, but he pointed to his sightless eyes, and asked Dr. Trumbull to cure his blindness. He thought that this traveler was a representative of God who could heal him. Such is the faith that exists in the East, in modern times. This universal faith in divine power to heal, in Messianic times, presented Jesus and His apostles with a marvelous opportunity to demonstrate the healing power of a compassionate God.

CHAPTER 17

DEATH IN ORIENTAL LANDS

THE ATTITUDE OF THE PEOPLE of the East toward death, and their behavior at such times, is so strikingly different from the attitude and behavior in the West that the Bible student will do well to study such customs.

The Death Wail

As soon as a death has taken place in the Orient, a wail is raised that announces to all the neighborhood what has happened. This is a sign for the relatives to begin demonstrating their sorrow. This death wail is referred to in connection with the first-born of Egypt, "And Pharaoh rose up in the night, he, and all his servants, and all the Egyptians; and there was a great cry in Egypt; for there was not a house where there was not one dead" ([Exod. 12:30](#)).

Such a death-wail heard in an Eastern desert has been thus described as, "a sharp, shrill, ear-piercing shriek." This shriek is followed by prolonged wails. When this is heard, everybody knows a death has occurred.

Lamentation

From the time the death wail is heard, until the burial takes place, relatives and friends continue their lamentation. The prophet Micah compares it to the cry of wild beasts or birds: "I will make a wailing like the jackals, and a lamentation like the ostriches" ([Micah 1:8](#), A. R. V.). Such lamentation was in the house of Jairus when Jesus entered it: "And he cometh to the house of the ruler of the synagogue, and seeth the tumult, and them that wept and wailed greatly" ([Mark 5:38](#)).

In connection with the lamentations, there are apt to be certain exclamations of sorrow used. David mourned over the death of Absalom: "O my son Absalom, my son, my son Absalom! would God I had died for thee, O Absalom, my son, my son!" ([2Sam. 18:33](#)). Certain words are repeated over and over again. The exclamations concerning the disobedient prophet who died, were: "Alas, my brother!" And in mourning the death of a king, the words were used, "Ah lord!" and "Ah his glory!" ([Jer. 22:18](#)).

The Hebrew prophets mention professional mourners, who were called in at the time of sorrow to express mourning for the dead. "Call for the mourning women, that they may come; . . . and let them make haste, and take up a wailing for us" ([Jer. 9:17, 18](#)). Another reference is to "such as are skillful of lamentation" ([Amos 5:16](#)). The presence of such a group of mourners hired for the occasion seems out of place to the Occidental mind; but certainly such professional wailers are no more lacking in helpfulness to the Easterner than are nonreligious professional singers at a Western funeral service.

bier, with a pole at each corner, and thus carried on the shoulders of men to the tomb for burial. The description of Lazarus, when Jesus called him forth from the tomb, indicates that the same custom was practiced in those days: "Out came the dead man, his feet and hands tied with wrappings, and his face tied up with a handkerchief" ([John 11:44](#), Williams). Also we know that the body of Jesus was thus wrapped by Joseph of Arimathea and Nicodemus: "Then took they the body of Jesus, and wound it in linen clothes with the spices, as the manner of the Jews is to bury" ([John 19:40](#)). Embalming spices were used when they could be afforded.

Eastern Funerals

Burial Follows Death Quickly

The burial of the dead in the East takes place soon after death, usually the same day. The people of these regions have a primitive idea that the spirit of the one who dies, hovers near the body for three days after death. Mourners think of this spirit as being able to bear the wailing calls of grief. Martha, no doubt, thought it would be hopeless to think of reviving her brother's body, because he had been dead four days ([John 11:39](#)).

Burial in caves, tombs, or graves. Today there are thousands of rock-cut tombs scattered over the land of Palestine, to bring to mind past decades. Such tombs were made by the wealthy. Not being able to afford these, the poorer folks buried their dead in graves. Some of these tombs had many chambers in them. They were closed by a rolling-stone which ran down an inclined plane in front of the mouth of the sepulcher. In the vicinity of ancient Gadara ([Luke 8:27](#)), there are many rock-hewn tombs today, bringing to mind the experience of Jesus when he met the demoniac who lived in the tombs.

Often the dead were buried in graves dug in the earth, as in the case of Deborah, Rebekah's nurse, who was buried under an oak at Bethel ([Gen. 35:8](#)). Natural caves were sometimes utilized, as in the case of the cave of Machpelah, where Abraham, Sarah, Isaac, Rebekah, Leah, and Jacob were placed ([Gen. 49:31](#); [Gen. 50:13](#)). When they could afford to do so, families had a sepulcher. Gideon was buried in the sepulcher of Joash his father ([Judges 8:32](#)). Only prophets and kings were buried within the limits of a city, as Samuel, who was buried in his house at Ramah ([1Sam. 25:1](#)), and David, who was buried in the city of David ([1Kings 2:10](#)). A graveyard for poorer people was located outside Jerusalem ([2Kings 23:6](#)). Many of the villages had graveyards outside their limits, as for example Nain, where Jesus raised the widow's son ([Luke 7:11-17](#)). There is a graveyard located there today. *Custom following burial.* In Bible times it was quite customary for the sorrowing ones to fast up to the time of burial. Then, following the funeral, they would be offered bread and wine as a comforting refreshment. Such was called a mourning feast, which had as its real purpose the comforting of the mourners. The prophet Jeremiah refers to this custom: "Neither shall men break bread for them in mourning, to comfort them for the dead; neither shall men give them the cup of consolation to drink for their father or for their mother" ([Jer. 16:7](#), A. R. V.). This mourning feast brought to an end the period of deepest sorrow and strict fasting.

Biblical Expressions Of Oriental Mourning

The Psalmists, Prophets, and Apostles often make use of expressions referring to Oriental mourning. Some of these cannot be appreciated by the Occidental, unless the highly emotional character of the Easterner is understood, and also his fondness for figurative language. The Psalmist says: "Rivers of waters run down mine eyes, because they keep not thy law" ([Psa. 119:136](#)). The prophet exclaims, "Oh that my head were waters, and mine eyes a fountain of tears, that I might weep day and night for the slain of the daughter of my people!" ([Jer. 9:1](#)). And it was to Orientals that Paul said, "Weep with them that weep" ([Rom. 12:15](#)). It will pay the Bible student dividends if he will read the Word from the Oriental point of view.

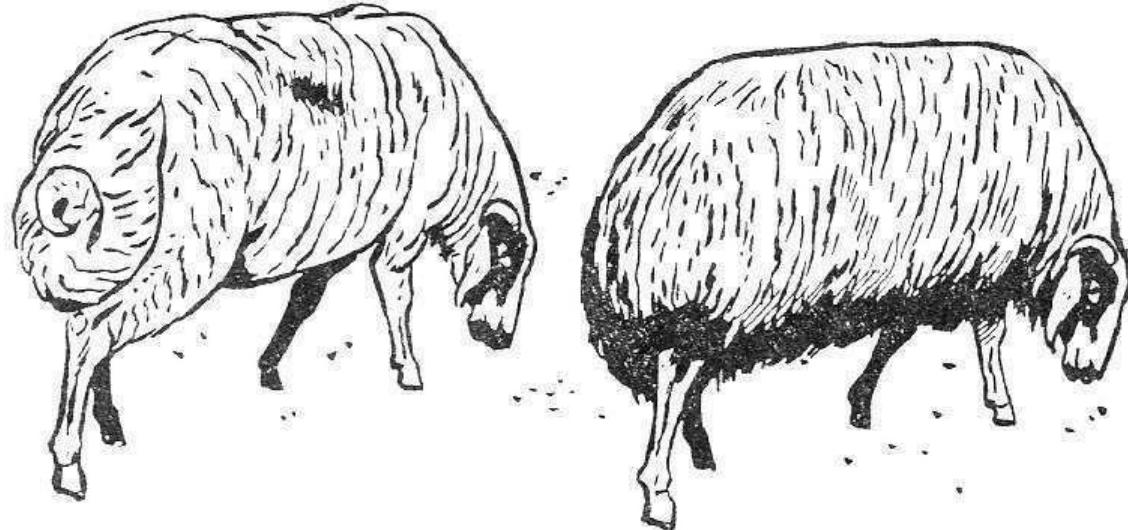
CHAPTER 18

SHEPHERD LIFE; THE CARE OF SHEEP AND GOATS

Sheep In The Land Of Israel

LARGE NUMBER OF SHEEP IN PALESTINE. From the days of Abraham down to modern times, sheep have abounded in the Holy Land. The Arabs of Bible lands have largely been dependent through the centuries upon sheep for their living. The Jews of Bible times were first shepherds and then farmers, but they never abandoned entirely their shepherd life. The large number of sheep in the land can be understood when it is realized that Job had fourteen thousand sheep ([Job. 42:12](#)), and that King Solomon at the Temple's dedication, sacrificed one hundred and twenty thousand sheep ([1Kings 8:63](#)).

Fat-tailed Sheep The Variety Mostly In Use



Fat-tailed Sheep

Picture:

Fat-tailed Sheep

The fat tail provides reserve strength for the sheep, much like the hump does on a camel. There is energy in the tail. When the sheep is butchered, this fatty tail is quite valuable. People will buy the tail, or part of it, and use it for frying. That this variety of sheep was in use in ancient times is seen by references in the Pentateuch to the fat tail of the sheep. "Also thou shalt take of the ram the fat, and the fat tail, and the fat that covereth the inwards" ([Exod. 29:22](#), A. R. V.). "The fat tail entire, he shall take away hard by the backbone" ([Lev. 3:9](#), A. R. V.).

The Shepherd

Youngest Boy Often The Shepherd

The youngest boy in the family becomes shepherd of the sheep, especially when the Arab peasant is a shepherd as well as being a farmer of grain. As the older son grows up he transfers his energies from sheep raising to helping the father with sowing, plowing, and harvesting the crops, and passes on the shepherd's task to the next younger boy. And so the job is passed from older to younger until the youngest of all becomes the family shepherd. Such must have been the custom when Jesse raised his family of eight sons. "And Samuel said unto Jesse, Are here all thy children? And he said, There remaineth yet the youngest, and behold, he keepeth the sheep" ([1Sam. 16:11](#)). David, being the youngest of eight sons, became the family shepherd. His experiences as a shepherd lad were often used to illustrate his beautiful psalms. His Shepherd Psalm has become the classic of the ages.

The Shepherd's Garb

The dress of an Arab shepherd lad is a simple tunic of cotton that is girded around his body by a leathern girdle, and his outer garment, called *aba*, is often of camel's hair, like that of John the Baptist ([Matt. 3:4](#)). The *aba* keeps the boy warm, is able to shed the rain, and at night is used as a blanket in which to wrap himself.

The Shepherd's Srip

This is a bag made of dried skin. When he leaves home to go and tend the sheep, his mother will put into it some bread, cheese, dried fruit, and probably some olives. It was into this bag that David placed the five smooth stones when he went to battle with the giant Goliath ([1Sam. 17:40](#)).

The Shepherd's Rod

It is like a policeman's club. It is often made of oak wood and has a knob on the end of it. Into this knob nails are sometimes driven so as to make a better weapon. It is very useful for protection, and no shepherd would be without it. It was no doubt the rod that David used in protecting his sheep from wild animals ([1Sam. 17:34-36](#)). He mentions both the rod and the staff in his Shepherd Psalm ([Psa. 23:4](#)).

The prophet Ezekiel refers to the custom of the sheep passing under the shepherd's rod for the purpose of counting or inspecting them. "I will cause you to pass under the rod" ([Ezek. 20:37](#)). The law of Moses speaks of tithing the flock for a specific purpose at such a time. "And concerning the tithe of the herd, or of the flock, even of whatsoever passeth under the rod, the tenth shall be holy unto the Lord" ([Lev. 27:32](#)). To do this Jewish writers tell us that the shepherd allowed the animals to come by him as they would under the rod at a narrow entrance. The head of the rod was dipped into some coloring fluid and was allowed to come down upon every tenth one that passed by, thus marking him as the one to be given to the Lord for sacrificial purposes.

The *scepter*, which the ancient kings of the East usually had with them, had its origin in the *shepherd's rod*. Kings were considered to be shepherds of their people. Thus the scepter, or rod, of the king became a symbol of protection, power, and authority. Young translates [Micah 7:14](#): "Rule thou thy people with thy rod, the flock of thine inheritance."

The Shepherd's Staff

David mentions the staff along with the rod in his Shepherd Psalm ([Psa. 23:4](#)). It is a stick five or six feet long and sometimes but not always has a crook at the end of it. It is used like Western men would use a cane or walking stick. It is useful in handling the sheep, and also for protection.

The Shepherd's Sling

It was a simple affair, being composed of two strings of sinew, rope, or leather, and a receptacle of leather to receive the stone. It was swung a time or two around the head and then was discharged by letting go one of the strings. The shepherd, in addition to using his sling against wild animals or robbers, found it very handy in directing the sheep. A stone could be dropped close to a sheep that was lagging behind and startle it into coming along with the rest of the flock. Or if one would get away in another direction, then a stone would be slung so as to drop just beyond the straying sheep, and thus bring him back. It was the shepherd's sling that young David used in slaying the giant Goliath ([1Sam. 17:40-49](#)). In her plea to David, Abigail was no doubt contrasting two items of his shepherd's equipment when she said, "The soul of my lord shall be bound in the bundle of life with the Lord thy God; and the souls of thine enemies, them shall he sling out, as out of the middle of a sling" ([1Sam. 25:29](#)). The "bundle of life" could be translated either "the pouch of life," or "the bag of life," and most probably refers to the shepherd's scrip. David's enemies were to be like the stones in his sling, being that which was to be thrown away; whereas David's soul would be like the provisions in his scrip, which were to be kept and guarded by the Lord himself.

The Shepherd's Flute



Shepherd and His Flute

Picture:

Shepherd and His Flute

A dual-piped flute of reed is generally carried by the Arab shepherd. It is true that minor strains of music come from this flute, but the heart of the shepherd is stirred, and the sheep of the flock are refreshed by the invigorating music that comes from this simple instrument. There can be little question but that David used such an instrument when he was with his flock, in the same way the shepherd lads have done for centuries around Bethlehem. It is of interest to know that the word in the Arabic language which is the equivalent of the Hebrew word for "Psalm" is *mazmoor*, which means "played on a pipe or flute."

Food And Water For The Flock

Food Planned For The Flock

One of the principal duties at all seasons of the year is for the shepherd to plan food for his flock. In the springtime there is an abundance of green pasture, and usually the sheep are allowed to graze near to the village where the shepherd's home is located. After the grain is reaped, and the poor have had an opportunity to glean what is left for them, then the shepherd brings in his flock, and the sheep feed on certain fresh growths, or dried blades, or an occasional ear of grain that the reapers may have left, or was overlooked by the gleaners. When this source of food is exhausted then the pasture is sought in other places. The wilderness of Judea which is located along the western side of the Jordan Valley is carpeted in the spring with a certain amount of grass and this turns into standing hay as the hot weather comes, and this becomes food for the sheep during part of the summer.

Scripture often refers to shepherds looking for pasture for their flocks. "And they went to the entrance of Gedor, even unto the east side of the valley, to seek pasture for their flocks" ([1Chron. 4:39](#)). The Psalmist thanks God for the pasturage which the Lord as Shepherd provides for His people: "So we thy people and sheep of thy pasture will give thee thanks for ever" ([Psa. 79:13](#)).

In the late autumn or winter months, there are times when the shepherd can find no pasturage that is available for his flock, and then he must become responsible for feeding the animals himself. If the flock is small there may be times when it is stabled within the peasant house, and the family lives on a sort of mezzanine floor above it. At, such seasons of the year the shepherd must provide the food. This is what Isaiah meant when he said: "He shall feed his flock like a shepherd" ([Isa. 40:11](#)). In some sections of Syria, flocks are taken at this season to places in the mountain country, where the shepherd busies himself with the bushy trees, cutting down branches that have green leaves or tender twigs, that the sheep and goats can eat. Micah was probably speaking of this custom of

providing food for the sheep, when he said: "Feed thy people with thy rod, the flock of thine heritage" ([Micah 7:14](#)).

Water Provided For The Flock.



Shepherd Leading the Flock

Picture:

Shepherd Leading the Flock

In selecting pasture for the flock, it is an absolute necessity that water be provided, and that it be easy of access. Often flocks are stationed near to a stream of running water. But the sheep are apt to be afraid of drinking water that moves quickly, or that is agitated. Therefore the shepherd looks for pools of water, or provides some quiet place where they may quench their thirst. How appropriate then are the words concerning the divine Shepherd: "He leadeth me beside the still waters" ([Psa. 23:2](#)). But when all such watering places are dried up in the heat of summer, as is often the case in Palestine, then wells are used. Usually a large rock is placed over the mouth of the well and this must be removed, as Jacob did, before the sheep can be watered ([Gen. 29:8-10](#)). Noontide is usually the time for watering the sheep. When Jacob was at the well, he said, "Lo, it is yet high day ... water ye the sheep" ([Gen. 29:7](#)). The matter of water supply plays an important part in locating the flock for pasturage.

The Sheepfold

A Simple Improvised Sheepfold

Such is sometimes made by the shepherd when he is a distance from his home, or especially when he may be in the territory of mountains. It is a temporary affair that can be taken down easily when it comes time to move on to another location. A fence is built of tangled thorn bushes or rude bowers. This is all the protection that is needed, as the shepherds often sleep with their flocks when the weather permits. Ezekiel mentions such a sheepfold when he predicts the future of Israel: "I will feed them in a good pasture, and upon the high mountains of Israel shall their fold be" ([Ezek. 34:14](#)).

Sheepcotes In Connection With Caves

There are many caves in the Holy Land, and when one of these is available it is utilized as a sheepcote. During stormy weather, and at night, the sheep retreat into the cave, but at other times they are kept in the enclosure immediately in front of the cave's mouth. This enclosure is generally constructed of loose stones piled up in a circular wall, with thorns on the top. The cave into which King Saul went to rest, and David and his men were already within it, was a cavern with a fold built in connection with it. "And he came to the sheepcotes by the way, where was a cave; and Saul went in to cover his feet" ([1Sam. 24:3](#)).

More Permanent Sheepfolds

Such shelters are usually built by the shepherd in a valley, or else on the sunny side of a hill where there is protection from cold winds. This fold is a low building with arches in front of it, and a wall forming an outdoor enclosure, joining the building. When the weather is mild, the sheep and goats are allowed to be in the enclosure during the night, but if the weather is stormy, or the evenings are cold, then the flock is shut up in the interior part of the fold, with its protection of roof and walls. The walls of the enclosure are about three feet wide at the bottom, and become narrower at the top. They are from four to six feet high. Large stones are used in constructing the outsides of the wall, and they are also placed on the top, and then the center is filled with smaller pieces of stone, of which there is much in the land. Sharp, thorn bushes are put on the top of this wall to protect the sheep from wild animals or robbers. There is a gate guarded by a watchman.

Jesus made reference to the familiar sheepfold of Palestine when He spoke those memorable words of His: "He that entereth not by the door into the sheepfold, but climbeth up some other way, the same is a thief and a robber. But he that entereth in by the door is the shepherd of the sheep. To him the porter [watchman] openeth" ([John 10:1-3](#)).

Handling And Gathering The Sheep

Several Flocks Sometimes Allowed To Mix

More than one flock may be kept in the same fold, and often flocks are mixed while being watered at a well. For the time being, no attempt is made to separate them. Jacob saw such a mixture of flocks: "Then Jacob went on his journey, and came into the land of the people of the East. And he looked, and behold, a well in the field, and lo, there were three flocks of sheep lying by it" ([Gen. 29:1-3](#)).

Ability To Separate The Sheep

When it becomes necessary to separate several flocks of sheep, one shepherd after another will stand up and call out: "Tahhoo! Tahhoo!" or a similar call of his own choosing. The sheep lift up their heads, and after a general scramble, begin following each one his own shepherd. They are thoroughly familiar with their own shepherd's tone of voice. Strangers have often used the same call, but their attempts to get the sheep to follow them always fail. The words of Jesus are indeed true to Eastern shepherd life when he said: "The sheep follow him, for they know his voice. And a stranger will they not follow, but will flee from him: for they know not the voice of strangers" ([John 10:4, 5](#)).

Gathering Scattered Sheep

The shepherd knows how to gather sheep that have been scattered. Especially is this necessary when the sheep must be led back to the fold, or when they are to be guided to another pasture. It is accomplished by his standing in the center of his scattered sheep, and giving them the call which serves as the notes of a bugle do to an army of men. Pebbles are sent by means of his slingshot in the direction of and beyond members of the flock that fail to heed the call, in order to get their attention and then bring them back. He does not commence to lead them away until he knows they are all there. Ezekiel predicts that the Lord as Shepherd of Israel will one day gather His people that have been scattered, and will bring them back to their own land of Palestine.

As a shepherd seeketh out his flock in the day that he is among his sheep that are scattered; so will I seek out my sheep, and will deliver them out of all places where they have been scattered in the cloudy and dark day. And I will bring them out from the people, and gather them from the countries, and will bring them to their own land, and feed them upon the mountains of Israel ([Ezek. 34:12, 13](#)).

The Use Of Dogs

Some shepherds make use of dogs. When dogs are possessed, they are of value in handling the flock. When traveling, the shepherd usually walks ahead, and the dogs are allowed to bring up the rear. They bark furiously at any intruder among them, and therefore warn of possible danger to the flock. When the sheep are in the fold, then the dogs become the guardians against any possible attack by an enemy. Many a foe of the sheep has been frightened away by the defiant barking of these animals. The patriarch Job spoke of shepherd dogs: "They that are younger than I have me in derision, whose fathers I would have disdained to have set with the dogs of my flock" ([Job 30:1](#)).

Intimate Relationship Between Shepherd And Sheep

When we learn of the intimate relationship that exists between the shepherd and his sheep, the figure of the Lord as a Shepherd of His people takes on new meaning.

Giving Names To The Sheep

Jesus said concerning the shepherd of his day: "He calleth his own sheep by name" ([John 10:3](#)). Today, the eastern shepherd delights to give names to certain of his sheep, and if his flock is not too large, all of his sheep may be given names. He knows them by means of certain individual characteristics. He names one: "Pure White"; another, "Striped"; another, "Black"; another, "Brown"; and still another, "Gray-eared." All this indicates the tender affection which he has for every one of his flock .

Guidance For The Sheep

The Eastern shepherd never drives his sheep as does the Western shepherd. He always leads them, often going before them. "And when he putteth forth his own sheep, he goeth before them" ([John 10:4](#)). This does not mean that the shepherd is *always* in front of his sheep. Although he may be usually in that position when traveling, he often walks by their side, and sometimes follows behind, especially if the flock is headed for the fold in the evening. From the rear he can gather any stragglers, and protect such from a sly attack from a wild animal. If the flock is a large one, the shepherd will be in front, and a helper will follow behind. Isaiah speaks of the omnipresent Lord in a double relationship to His people: "For ye shall not go out with haste, nor go by flight: for the Lord will go before you; and the God of Israel will be your rereward [rear guard]" ([Isa. 52:12](#)).

The skill of the shepherd, and personal relationship to them is clearly seen when he guides his sheep along narrow paths. The Shepherd Psalm says: "He leadeth me in the paths of righteousness" ([Psa. 23:3](#)). The grain fields are seldom fenced or hedged in Bible lands, and sometimes only a narrow path runs between the pasture and these fields. The sheep are forbidden to eat in the fields where crops are growing. Thus in guiding the sheep along such a path, the shepherd must not allow any of the animals to get into the

forbidden area, because if he does, he must pay damages to the owner of the grain. One Syrian shepherd has been known to guide a flock of one hundred fifty sheep without any help, along such a narrow path for quite a distance, without letting a single sheep go where he was not allowed to go.

Straying Sheep Restored

It is very important that sheep should not be allowed to stray away from the flock, because when by themselves they are utterly helpless. In such a condition, they become bewildered, for they have no sense at all of locality. And if they do stray away, they must be brought back. The Psalmist prayed the prayer: "I have gone astray like a lost sheep; seek thy servant" ([Psa. 119:176](#)). The prophet Isaiah compared man's waywardness to that of sheep: "All we like sheep have gone astray" ([Isa. 53:6](#)). David sang of his divine Shepherd: "He restoreth my soul" ([Psa. 23:3](#)).

Playing With The Sheep

The shepherd is so constantly with his sheep that sometimes his life with them becomes monotonous. Therefore he will occasionally play with them. He does this by pretending to run away from his sheep, and they will soon overtake him, and completely surround him, gamboling with great delight. Sometimes God's people think He forsakes them when trouble comes their way. They say: "The Lord hath forsaken me" ([Isa. 49:14](#)). But actually their divine Shepherd says to them: "I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee" ([Heb. 13:5](#)).

Intimate Knowledge Of The Sheep

The shepherd is deeply interested in every single one of his flock. Some of them may be given pet names because of incidents connected with them. They are usually counted each evening as they enter the fold, but sometimes the shepherd dispenses with the counting, for he is able to *feel* the absence of any one of his sheep. With one sheep gone, something is felt to be missing from the appearance of the entire flock. One shepherd in the Lebanon district was asked if he always counted his sheep each evening. He replied in the negative, and then was asked how then he knew if all his sheep were present. This was his reply: "Master, if you were to put a cloth over my eyes, and bring me any sheep and only let me put hands on its face, I could tell in a moment if it was mine or not."

When H. R. P. Dickson visited the desert Arabs, he witnessed an event that revealed the amazing knowledge which some of them have of their sheep. One evening, shortly after dark, an Arab shepherd began to call out one by one the names of his fifty-one mother sheep, and was able to pick out each one's lamb, and restore it to its mother to suckle. To do this in the light would be a feat for many shepherds, but this was done in complete darkness, and in the midst of the noise coming from the ewes crying for their lambs, and the lambs crying for their mothers. But no Oriental shepherd ever had a more intimate knowledge of his sheep than Jesus our great Shepherd has of those who belong to His flock. He once said of Himself: "I am the good shepherd, and know my sheep" ([John 10:14](#)).

The Difference Between The Shepherd And The Hireling

Concerning the hireling, Jesus said: "The hireling fleeth, because he is an hireling, and careth not for the sheep" ([John 10:13](#)). When the flock is small, the shepherd handles his sheep without any help but if the flock becomes too large, then it becomes necessary for him to hire someone to help him with the sheep. One man can usually handle from fifty to one hundred sheep, but when he has more than one hundred, he usually seeks a helper. The hireling does not usually have the personal interest in the sheep that the shepherd has, and so cannot always be trusted to defend the flock in the way the shepherd himself would do. "He that is an hireling, and not the shepherd, whose own the sheep are not, seeth the wolf coming, and leaveth the sheep, and fleeth: and the wolf catcheth them, and scattereth the sheep" ([John 10:12](#)).

Caring For The Sheep In Special Times Of Need

The love of the shepherd for his sheep is best seen when times of special need call forth unusual acts of care for members of the flock.

Crossing A Stream Of Water

This process is most interesting. The shepherd leads the way into the water and across the stream. Those favored sheep who always keep hard by the shepherd, plunge boldly into the water, and are soon across. Others of the flock enter the stream with hesitation and alarm. Not being close to their guide, they may miss the fording place and be carried down the river a distance, but will probably be able to clamber ashore. The little lambs may be driven into the water by the dogs, and they are heard to bleat pitifully as they leap and plunge. Some manage to get across, but if one is swept away, then the shepherd leaps quickly into the stream and rescues it, carrying it in his bosom to the shore. When they all arrive over the stream, the lambs will gambol about with joy, and the sheep will gather around their shepherd as if to express their thankfulness to him. Our divine Shepherd has a word of encouragement for all His sheep who must pass through streams of affliction: "When thou passest through the waters, I will be with thee; and through the rivers, they shall not overflow thee" ([Isa. 43:2](#)).

Special Care Of Baby Lambs, And Sheep With Young Ones

When lambing time comes, the shepherd must take great care of his flock. The task is made more difficult because it so often becomes necessary to move to a new location to find pasturage. The sheep that are soon to become mothers, as well as those with their young ones, must be kept close to the shepherd while in transit. Little helpless lambs that cannot keep up with the rest of the flock, are carried in the bosom of his undergarment, the girdle turning it into a pocket. Isaiah pictures this activity in his famous passage: "He shall feed his flock like a shepherd: he shall gather the lambs with his arm and carry them in his bosom, and shall gently lead those that are with young" ([Isa. 40:11](#)).

Care Of Sick Or Wounded Sheep

The shepherd is always on the lookout for members of his flock that need personal attention. Sometimes a lamb suffers from the rays of the sun, or its body may have been badly scratched by some thornbush. The most common remedy he uses with these sheep is olive oil, a supply of which he carries in a ram's horn. Perhaps David was thinking of such an experience when he wrote of the Lord, "Thou anointest my head with oil" ([Psa. 23:5](#)).

Watching Sheep At Night

In weather that permits, the shepherds often keep their flocks in the open country. One group of shepherds provided simple sleeping

places for themselves by placing "a number of oblong circles of stones, inside of which rushes were collected for bedding, according to the Bedouin fashion in the desert. These simple beds were arranged in a circle, and sticks and roots were collected at the center for a fire." With this arrangement they were able to keep watch over their sheep by night. It was in such a way as this that the Bethlehem shepherds took turns watching and sleeping on the hills outside Bethlehem, when the angels visited them announcing the Saviour's birth. "And there were in the same country shepherds abiding in the field, keeping watch over their flock by night" ([Luke 2:8](#)). When Jacob cared for Laban's sheep, he spent many a night in the out-of-doors, looking after the flock. "Thus I was; in the day the drought consumed me, and the frost by night; and my sleep departed from mine eyes" ([Gen. 31:40](#)).

Protection Of Sheep From, Robbers And Wild Animals

The sheep need to be guarded against robbers not only when they are in the open country, but also when they are in the fold. The bandits of Palestine are not apt to pick locks, but some of them may manage to climb up over the wall, and get into the fold, where they cut the throats of as many of the animals as possible and then sling them over the wall to others of their band, and all of them attempt to escape without being caught. Jesus described just such operations: "The thief cometh not, but for to steal, and to kill, and to destroy" ([John 10:10](#)). The shepherd must be on guard constantly for such an emergency, and must be ready for quick action to protect his rights in the flock.

The *wild animals* of Palestine today include wolves, panthers, hyenas, and jackals. The lion has not lived in the land since the days of the Crusaders. The last bear was killed over half a century ago. David as a shepherd lad experienced the coming of a lion and of a bear against his flock, and by the Lord's help, he was able to slay both of them ([1Sam. 17:34-37](#)). Amos tells of a shepherd attempting to rescue one of the flock from the lion's mouth: "As the shepherd taketh out of the mouth of the lion two legs, or a piece of an ear" ([Amos 3:12](#)). One experienced Syrian shepherd is reported to have followed a hyena to his lair and compelled the animal to give up his prey. He won his victory over the wild beast by himself howling in characteristic fashion, striking on rocks with his heavy staff, and flinging deadly stones with his slingshot. The sheep was then carried in his arms back to the fold. The faithful shepherd must be willing to risk his life for the sake of the flock, and perhaps give his life for them. As our Good Shepherd Jesus not only risked his life for us, He actually gave Himself on our behalf. He said: "I am the good shepherd: the good shepherd giveth his life for the sheep" ([John 10:11](#)).

Seeking And Finding Lost Sheep

Being responsible for anything that happens to one of his flock, the Eastern shepherd will spend hours if necessary in traversing the wilderness or mountain side, in search of a sheep that has strayed away and is lost. After weary hours of hunting for it, it will usually be found in some waterless hollow in the wilderness, or in some desolate mountain ravine. The exhausted creature will be born home on the shoulders of the sturdy shepherd. And what happens then is best described by the Parable of Jesus: "And when he cometh home, he calleth together his friends and neighbors, saying unto them, Rejoice with me; for I have found my sheep which was lost" ([Luke 15:6](#)).

Sheep Products

Sheep in Palestine and vicinity have always been valuable because of the important products that are derived from them.

Wool.

Wool

Wool has been a valuable product in Bible lands. In ancient times most of the clothing which the Israelites wore was made of wool. The large outer garment or mantle was usually woolen. The shearing months in Palestine are May and June. The sheep are washed before they are sheared. Solomon's Song speaks of "a flock of ewes that are newly shorn, which are come up from the washing" ([Cant. 4:2](#), A. R. V.). The color of the wool varies somewhat according to the color of the animal shorn, but white wool is considered to be most valuable. The prophet compares sins forgiven with the whiteness of wool ([Isa. 1:18](#)).

Sheepskins

From ancient times to modern days it has often been customary for pastoral people to make for themselves coats out of the skins of the sheep with wool still adhering to the skins. The Epistle to the Hebrews tells of the persecuted heroes of faith, saying of some of them that they "wandered about in sheepskins" ([Heb. 11:37](#)). The skin of sheep was at times tanned and then used as leather, but the skin of the goats was superior to that of sheep for this purpose.

Sheep For Meat Or Sacrificial Purposes

Sheep were often eaten when meat was desired. For the ordinary person, meat was not on the daily menu, but was only used on special occasions of rejoicing, as when a feast was prepared, a wedding supper, or when a guest of honor was being entertained. The animal was usually cooked as soon as it was killed, and then was often boiled, although sometimes it was roasted.

The sheep was used in Bible times more than any other animal for sacrificial purposes. A young male lamb was used in most cases as a thanksgiving offering, as atonement for transgression, or as redemption of a more valuable animal. The offering of the Passover Lamb was the most important religious act of the year. This lamb had to be a male, which was selected after minute examination, in order that it be free from any blemish, and it was to be a first year lamb. It was killed on the fourteenth of the month Abib (after the Babylonian captivity Nisan, about the equivalent of our April), and the blood was sprinkled with hyssop. In Egypt the blood was sprinkled on the lintels and doorposts of the houses, but in Canaan it was sprinkled on the altar. The meat was roasted with fire, rather than boiled, and not a bone was broken, as was customary when it was boiled. It was eaten by the entire household in the spirit of haste, as if a journey was being started. Anything left of it was burned with fire, and not left over for the next day. The Feast of the Passover was the most important of all the Jewish annual feasts, and formed the background for the Christian ordinance of the Lord's Supper (cf. [Exod. 12](#); [Lev. 23:5](#) f.; [Matt. 26:17-29](#)).

Milk.

Milk

Milk from the sheep is especially rich, and in the Orient is considered to be of more value than that of the cattle. Milk is seldom drunk in its fresh condition, but rather is made into "leben," or into cheese. Buttermilk is also much used.

Rams' Horns

The horns of the rams are considered to be of great value. In many Western lands, growers of sheep have endeavored to develop a hornless breed, but in the East the horns are thought of as an important part of the animal. The ram's horn has been used chiefly as a vessel in which liquids have been carried. For carrying purposes a wooden plug is driven into the large end of the horn so as to close it, and sometimes it is covered with raw hide to hold it in place. The small part of the pointed end of the horn is cut off, and the opening closed with a stopper. The ram's horn was used in Bible times to carry oil. Samuel was told to take his horn of oil and anoint David to be the future king ([1Sam. 16:1](#)). Solomon was anointed king by the oil in the horn of Zadok the priest ([1Kings 1:39](#)). Reference has already been made to the shepherd's use of oil with his sheep, and this was carried in a ram's horn.

The ram's horn was also made into a trumpet and has been called by the Jews, *Shofar*. The Mosaic Law called for the sounding of rams' horns at certain times. Each year of Jubilee was ushered in by the blowing of these horns. "Then shalt thou cause the trumpet of the jubilee to sound on the tenth day of the seventh month, in the day of atonement shall ye make the trumpet sound throughout all your land" ([Lev. 25:9](#)). In connection with the Feast of Trumpets there was to be "a day of blowing the trumpets" ([Num. 29:1](#)). The most famous use of the rams' horns was in connection with the encircling and destruction of the city of Jericho by Joshua's army. "And seven priests shall bear before the ark seven trumpets of rams' horns; and the seventh day ye shall compass the city seven times, and the priests shall blow with the trumpets" ([Josh. 6:4](#)). The trumpets were also used as signals to gather the people ([Jer. 4:5](#)).

The ram's horn trumpet measures about eighteen inches long and is in one piece. It is made from the left horn of the fat-tailed sheep, which is "not spiral but flattish, curved backwards, and forming nearly a circle, the point passing under the ear. This structure, added to the large size of the horn, adapts it well for its purpose. In order to bring it to the proper shape, the horn is softened by heat (i.e. hot water) and then modeled into the very form which was used by the Jewish priests."

Goats

Care Of Goats-leadership Ability

There are many goats being cared for by Bible land shepherds. A shepherd looks after them much as he would care for a flock of sheep. Sometimes the goats belong to one flock along with the sheep, and in this case:

It is usually a he-goat that is the special leader of the whole ([Jer. 50:8](#); [Prov. 30:31](#)), walking before it as gravely as a sexton before the white flock of a church choir. It is from this custom that Isaiah speaks of kings as "the he-goats of the earth" ([Isa. 14:9](#), A. R. V., M.), a name applied to them by Zechariah also ([Zech. 10:3](#)), and to Alexander the Great by Daniel, who describes him as a he-goat from the west, with a notable horn between his eyes ([Dan. 8:5](#)): a fitting symbol of his irresistible power at the head of the Macedonian army.

How Goats Differ From Sheep

Most of the Palestinian and Syrian sheep are white, whereas most of the goats are black. The goats like the slopes of the rocky mountains, whereas the sheep prefer the plains or mountain valleys. The goats are especially fond of young leaves of trees, but the sheep would rather have grass. Goats will feed during all the day without the heat of summer affecting them; but when the sunshine is hot, the sheep will lie down under a tree, or in the shade of a rock, or in a rude shelter prepared by the shepherd for that purpose. Song of Solomon makes mention of this rest time for the sheep: "Tell me, O thou whom my soul loveth, where thou feedest, where thou makest thy flock to rest at noon" ([Cant. 1:7](#)). The goats are bolder, more venturesome, more playful, more apt to clamber to dangerous places, more apt to break into the grainfields, more headstrong, more vigorous, and more difficult to control than are the sheep.

Separating Goats From Sheep

At certain times it becomes necessary to separate the goats from the sheep, although they may be cared for by the same shepherd that cares for the sheep. They do not graze well together, and so it frequently becomes necessary to keep them apart from the sheep while they are grazing. Dr. John A. Broadus, when visiting Palestine, reported seeing a shepherd leading his flock of white sheep and black goats all mingled together. When he turned into a valley, having led them across the Plain of Sharon, he turned around and faced his flock: "When a sheep came up, he tapped it with his long staff on the right side of the head, and it quickly moved off to his right; a goat he tapped on the other side, and it went to his left." This is the picture the Saviour had in mind when he spoke the solemn words: "And before him shall be gathered all nations: and he shall separate them one from another, as a shepherd divideth his sheep from the goats; and he shall set the sheep on his right hand, but the goats on the left" ([Matt. 25:32-33](#)).

Use Of Goat's Milk

The milk derived from goats is especially excellent and rich. Most of the "leben" used today and in Bible times is made from goat's milk. Buttermilk and cheese are also utilized as milk products. The book of Proverbs speaks of the importance of goat's milk to the Hebrew people: "Thou shalt have goat's milk enough for thy food, for the food of thy household, and for the maintenance of thy maidens" ([Prov. 27:27](#)).

Use Of The Meat Of Kids

The meat of an adult male goat is of course rather tough, and so not ordinarily used. The female goats are seldom killed because they are needed to increase the flock. Thus it is the meat of the young male kid that is largely used in Bible lands. In Old Testament times, when visitors were entertained, often a kid was made ready for the meal (cf. [Judges 6:19](#)). The prevalence of the flesh of kids in Christ's day is brought out by the reference of the Prodigal's brother. "And he answering said to his father, Lo, these many years do I serve thee, neither transgressed I at any time thy commandment: and yet thou never gavest me a kid, that I might make merry with my friends" ([Luke 15:29](#)). There is sarcasm in this reproof, for the kid was of less value at a banquet than would have been a lamb, and considerably inferior to the *fatted calf*, which was killed and served on only special occasions to do honor to a very special guest. The brother was objecting to the father serving the fatted calf at the banquet honoring the return of the Prodigal, whereas he as the elder brother had not been given even a *kid* to make merry with his friends.

Use Of Goats' Hair And Goats' Skin

The *hair* of the goat was considered to be of great value to the Hebrew people. When the materials were brought for the construction of the Tabernacle in the Wilderness, only the finest and the costliest that could be obtained were accepted; and goats' hair

was included in the list of materials the children of Israel offered unto the Lord. See ([Exod. 35:23](#)). Tabernacle curtains were made of goats' hair ([Exod. 26:7](#)). The tents of the Bedouin Arabs are made of goats' hair, just as were similar dwellings in Old and New Testament times. Goats' skins have been used widely in Bible lands for leather, and are considered to be better for this purpose than the skin of sheep. This leather is used in making the Oriental "bottle" for carrying or storing water or other liquids.

Use Of Goats For Sacrifices

The Levitical Code often allowed the Hebrews a choice of a sheep or of a goat for the offering. "If his offering be of the flocks, namely, of the sheep, or of the goats, for a burnt sacrifice" ([Lev. 1:10](#)). On the Day of Atonement, it was required that a goat be sacrificed by the high priest, and that another goat should be "the scapegoat." "And the goat shall bear upon him all their iniquities unto a land not inhabited: and he shall let go the goat in the wilderness" ([Lev. 16:22](#)). Moses had ordered that the scapegoat should be taken out into the wilderness and turned loose. But in order to prevent its return to Jerusalem, it became customary to lead the creature to the height of a mountain, where it was pushed over and would be certainly killed. This was the symbol of the forgiveness of sin through the sacrifice of Christ. Although John the Baptist spoke of Jesus as the Lamb of God, he may have had in mind also the picture of the scapegoat when he said: "Behold, that is God's Lamb, who takes and bears away the sin of the world" ([John 1:29](#), Centenary, Montgomery).

CHAPTER 19

GROWING AND HARVESTING GRAIN

THE NUMEROUS REFERENCES to the growth of grain, which are found in the law of Moses, indicate that it was expected that the Israelites would become an agricultural people after entering the land of Canaan, and that the cultivation of grain would become one of their chief industries. It is a remarkable fact that the methods used by them in growing and harvesting this crop are, virtually the same as those that have been used by the Palestinian Arab peasants for centuries down to the present day.

Preliminary Preparation For Planting The Grain

Waiting For Rain Before Beginning To Plough

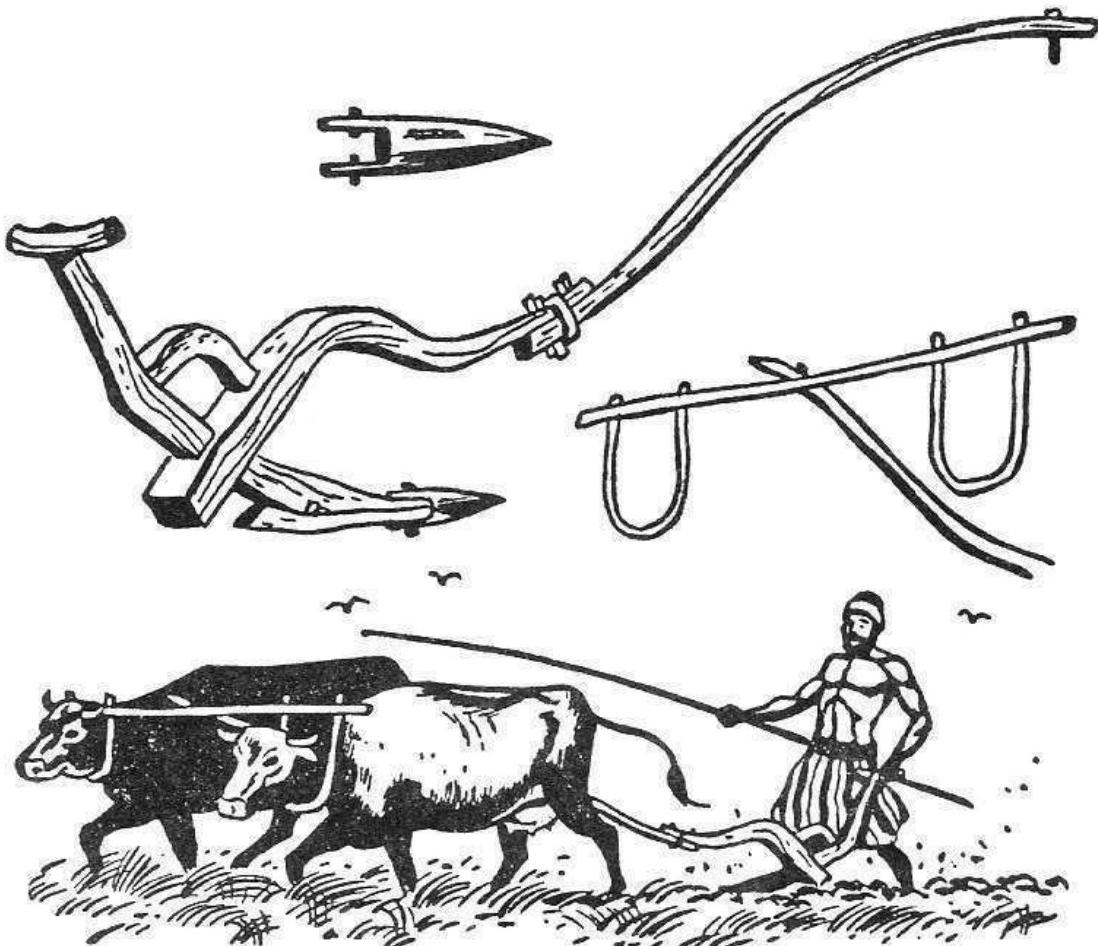
In Palestine, ploughing is done after the early rains have softened the earth (cf. [Psa. 65:10](#)). These rains usually come the latter part of October or the first part of November. If they do not come then, the farmer must wait for them before he can plough his ground. Job said, "They waited for me as for the rain" ([Job 29:23](#)). Jeremiah described lack of rain thus: "There was no rain in the earth, the ploughmen were ashamed, they covered their heads" ([Jer. 14:4](#)). Once the rain has come, the industrious farmer will start his ploughing. "The sluggard will not plough by reason of the cold" ([Prov. 20:4](#)). Such a man will retreat into his home and enjoy the warmth of his fire, but he will miss the harvest. Dr. Thomson tells of one year when the farmers waited until the month of February for sufficient rain to enable them to plough the ground for the grain crop. The harvest came late, but was abundant.

Getting Ready For Ploughing

The farmer gets ready for ploughing after the first rain starts falling, if he has not already done so before. He will spend the time making sure that his plough is in good repair and ready for action. He may need to cut and point a new goad to use in prodding his team of oxen. He must also see to it that his yoke is smooth and fits the necks of the animals. An ill-shaped or heavy yoke would gall them. The Lord Jesus spoke of "the easy yoke" promised to His obedient followers ([Matt. 11:30](#)). When the ground has been softened sufficiently by the rain, then the ploughing can begin.

Equipment Used In Ploughing

The Plough



Primitive Plowing

Primitive Plowing

Picture:

One type of Syrian or Palestinian plough is made up of two wooden beams which are joined together, and at the front end it is hooked to a yoke, and at the rear end it is fastened to a crosspiece, the upper part of which serves as the handle, and the lower part holds the iron ploughshare or colter. Even today many may be seen in Bible lands plowing with what we might term a "forked stick." Bible writers often mention iron ploughshares ([1Sam. 13:20](#), etc.). These ploughs could without much work be changed into swords for warfare. Thus the prophet Joel said: "Beat your ploughshares into swords" ([Joel 3:10](#)). Exactly the reverse of this prophecy was suggested by both the prophets Isaiah and Micah in predicting the Golden Age ([Isa. 2:4](#); [Micah 4:3](#)).

The Yoke.

The Yoke

The yoke is a rude stick that fits the necks of the cattle. Two straight sticks project down each side, and a cord at the end of these sticks and underneath the cattle's necks holds the yoke on the necks. These yokes of wood are often spoken of in the Scriptures ([Jer. 28:13](#), etc.).

The Goad.

The Goad

A goad is carried by the native ploughman today, and was also used in Bible times. It is a wooden rod varying in length from five to seven feet, with a sharp point at one end. With this the farmer can hurry up his slow-moving animals. It was such an ox-goad that was used by Shamgar in slaying six hundred Philistines ([Judges 3:31](#)). The conviction of sin that came to Saul of Tarsus and led to his conversion was compared to the pricks of an oxcart: "It is hard for thee to kick against the goad" ([Acts 26:14](#), A. R. V.).

Animals Used In Ploughing

Use Of Oxen

In Bible times oxen were used almost exclusively for ploughing. For this reason the expression "a yoke" was used by the Hebrews to mean the measure of land which a yoke of oxen could plough in a day (cf. [1Sam. 14:14](#), and [Isa. 5:10](#)). "Oxen" as the Hebrews used the term, meant both sexes of the animal, cows being used as well as bulls for purposes of draught, but the latter were castrated. This explains the reason for the law specifying concerning a heifer to be used for sacrificial purposes, that it be one "upon which never came yoke" ([Num. 19:2](#)). The law of Moses forbade ploughing with an ox and an ass yoked together ([Deut. 22:10](#)). The Apostle Paul spoke of "the unequal yoke" in connection with partnership between believers and unbelievers ([2Cor. 6:14](#)). Today, the Arabs usually make use of oxen in ploughing, but sometimes utilize camels, and occasionally yoke together an ox and a donkey, or a camel and a donkey.

Preparing The Soil For The Crop

Ploughing

The ploughing of the ground in Oriental fashion is quite primitive. The plough, which at best is a slight implement, can be carried if necessary two miles to the farmer's place of work. Of course by comparison with modern ploughs, it could be said merely to scratch the surface of the soil. The ploughman holds the one handle of the plough with one of his hands, while he carries the goad in the other hand, with which to prod the animals. Jesus said, "No man, having put his hand to the plough, and looking back, is fit for the kingdom of God" ([Luke 9:62](#)). He described the operation accurately in saying hand, i.e. *one hand*, rather than two hands, as is the case with a Western farmer. It would be fatal for the Palestinian farmer to look back, because his implement is so light that the worker often has to press down with all his weight upon it to keep it from leaving the furrow.

The Eastern farmers will sometimes plough together, each man having his own plough and team of oxen, and one following close behind the preceding one. This sort of farmer's club is adopted as a protection from roving Bedouin robbers, and also because co-operation is desired when the wheat farms are large. Thus Elisha was found ploughing with eleven other ploughmen and a total of twenty-four oxen ([1Kings 19:19](#)).

Use Of Pickax Or Mattock

Where the ground is hard, or on the rocky hillside, it is not possible to use the plough. In such places, if the peasant farmer is industrious, he will prepare the soil by using the pickax or mattock. Isaiah speaks of "hills that shall be digged with the mattock" ([Isa. 7:25](#)). By using such an implement, all the available ground is utilized for the crop."

Fertilizer Seldom Used

The Eastern farmer seldom adds fertilizer to his soil in raising grain. Many a hillside used by the farmer for his crop has a quantity of small, soft limestones scattered over it. Part of the lime in the stones is dissolved with each rainstorm, and mixing with the soil, makes it better qualified for a good stand of grain. These stones take care of liming the soil. Modern Jews, returning from the West to farm their land, are adding various chemicals from the Dead Sea as fertilizer for their soil. But there is no mention in the Bible of fertilizing the ground for a grain crop. Jesus did mention in one of his parables about the fertilizing of a fig tree ([Luke 13:1-9](#)).

Sowing The Seed

Kinds Of Grain Sown

There are various kinds of grain used in the Orient. The word "corn," as used in English translations of the Bible, is actually the family name for *cereal grains*, because the "maize" or "Indian corn" of modern days was doubtless unknown to Bible writers. The two principal grains cultivated in ancient Palestine were wheat and barley. There is one mention in the Old Testament of the use of millet ([Ezek. 4:9](#)). The Revisers in the A. R. V. have changed the word "rye" in [Exodus 9:32](#) and [Isaiah 28:25](#) to mean "spelt." In modern times, both rice and maize or Indian corn are used in Palestine, although the former is largely imported.

How And When The Seed Is Sown

The farmer usually carries his seed to his field in a large sack on the back of his donkey, and then the leather bag which he carries under his arm is replenished with seed from the sack. As a rule, the seed is scattered broadcast on the ground, and then it is covered over by the ploughing. Often the sower walks along, scattering his seed, and then one of his family, or a servant if he has one, follows directly with the plough. The Biblical word "to sow," as used in the Pentateuch ([Gen. 26:12](#); [Lev. 25:3](#), etc.), means, "to scatter seed."

Sowing As Illustrated By The Parable Of Jesus

The process of sowing, and what happens to the seed, is well illustrated by the Parable of the Sower. No better picture could be given of the Oriental process of sowing the grain than that given by Jesus in this parable ([Matt. 13:3-8](#); [Mark 4:3-8](#); [Luke 8:5-8](#)).

"Behold, a sower went forth to sow; and when he sowed, some seeds fell by the way side, and the fowls came and devoured them up" ([Matt. 13:3, 4](#)). Palestine had few roads in the modern sense of the word until the Romans built their roads, and these only connected the most important places. Because traveling was either on foot, or by means of donkeys, or camels, a simple footpath was usually all that was necessary. These paths were given over to public use by ancient custom. If a farmer had such a path running across his land, he would plough the earth to the edge of the narrow path, but would leave it for the use of travelers. The Synoptic Gospels tell of Jesus and His disciples traveling in this manner through a grainfield ([Matt. 12:1](#); [Mark 2:23](#); [Luke 6:1](#)). Hedges or fences were seldom erected along such a footpath. When the farmer scattered his seed, some was quite apt to fall on this "way," and not being covered by the plough soon enough, the birds would discover it and eat it.

"Others fell upon the rocky places, where they had not much earth: and straightway they sprang up, because they had no deepness of earth: and when the sun was risen, they were scorched; and because they had no root, they withered away" ([Matt. 13:5, 6](#), A. R. V.). The thought here is not of a soil that is mingled with stones, but rather a thin layer of mould covering a rock. Under such conditions, the grain would spring up quickly, but lacking depth of root, would be scorched by the sun, and fail to mature.

"And some fell among thorns; and the thorns sprung up, and choked them." In Palestine and Syria, there are many thornbushes present that are apt to grow adjoining the grainfields, and some of them will spring up in the midst of the grain. The native farmer uses these thornbushes in the summer for the outdoor fires for cooking the meals. Hence he is not so careful to get rid of them in the near vicinity, and so some of these will choke the wheat or barley shoots.

"But other fell into good ground, and brought forth fruit, some an hundredfold, some sixtyfold, some thirtyfold." The native farmers of Bible lands often have poor returns on the seed they sow, because their methods are primitive. But there are instances of good crops in modern times. Rev. George Mackie, who was a missionary to Syria, has said: "The soil is in many places exceedingly fertile, and the return corresponds to the standard cited in the parable." When Isaac farmed in the rich Negeb section of Southern Canaan, Scripture says: "Then Isaac sowed in that land, and received in the same year an hundredfold" ([Gen. 26:12](#)).

Birds.

Enemies Of The Grain

Birds

The birds of the air are foes of the grain. In the East, large flocks of birds often follow the farmer as he sows his seed in order to snatch up, if they can, what he has scattered. Some of the grain is therefore lost before the plough can succeed in covering it up. That which chances to fall on the path would readily be devoured by them ([Mark 4:4](#))

Tares.

Tares

The tares are also enemies of the grain. In his Parable of the Tares, Jesus said: "While men slept, his enemy came and sowed tares among the wheat" ([Matt. 13:25](#)). In the Holy Land, tares are something called "wild wheat," because they resemble wheat, only the grains are black. Thomson has this to say about the tares:

The Arabic name for tares is *zawan*, and they abound all over the East, and are a great nuisance to the farmer. The grain is small, and is arranged along the upper part of the stalk, which stands perfectly erect. Its taste is bitter, and when eaten separately, or when diffused in ordinary bread, it causes dizziness, and often acts as an emetic. In short, it is a strong soporific poison, and must be carefully winnowed, and picked out of the wheat, grain by grain, before grinding, or the flour is not healthy. Of course the farmers are very anxious to exterminate it, but that is nearly impossible.

Fire.

Fire

Fire is another enemy of the grain farmer. In Palestine, the Arabs let the wheat become dead ripe, and therefore as dry as tinder, before they cut it. Thorns usually grow all around the wheat fields and intermingle with the grain, and thus it would be easy for a fire starting with the thorns to spread to the wheat, and it would be difficult to keep a whole field from being burned. The law of Moses had a wise regulation regarding fire in relation to the grain fields: "If fire break out, and catch in thorns, so that the stacks of corn, or the standing corn, or the field, be consumed therewith; he that kindled the fire shall surely make restitution" ([Exod. 22:6](#)).

Locusts.

Locusts

The locusts are a dreaded enemy of the grain farmer. Perhaps these creatures are the most hated enemy of the Palestinian farmer. These locusts are very much like the large grasshopper with which the Westerner is acquainted. When they reach the proportion of a plague, they are indeed a vast multitude (cf. [Judges 6:5](#); [Judges 7:12](#)). They will occupy a space as large as ten or twelve miles long, and four or five miles wide. They are said to march like an army. The Book of Proverbs indicates this interesting fact about them: "Locusts have no king, but they march all in ranks [i.e., in orderly array]" ([Prov. 30:27](#), tr. of C. H. Toy). When the weather is cold and the air is moist, or if they become wet with the dew, then they will stay where they are until the sun has warmed and dried them. The prophet Nahum describes them thus: "Which camp in the hedges in the cold day, but when the sun ariseth they flee away" ([Nahum 3:17](#)). The prophet Joel describes the judgment of the Day of the Lord in terms of an invasion of locusts. The plague of locusts shuts out the light of the sun because of their great numbers ([Joel 2:2](#)). Before their coming, the land might be like the Garden of Eden, but after they leave, it has become a desolate wilderness ([Joel 2:3](#)). Their appearance is compared to horses because the form of their head resembles that of a horse ([Joel 2:4](#)). They make a loud noise when they are eating ([Joel 2:5](#)). The consternation which they cause to the people of the land may well be understood: "Before their face the people shall be much pained" ([Joel 2:6](#)). They are able to pass over walls, and to enter windows or doors of houses ([Joel 2:9](#)). The terrible fact is that sometimes one swarm of locusts after another may invade the same section of land Dr. Keil believes that this is what [Joel 1:4](#) describes, rather than different stages in the development of the locust. He gives a literal translation of the verse thus:

"The leavings of the gnawer the multiplier ate, and the leavings of the multiplier the licker ate, and the leavings of the licker, the devourer ate.

Thieves.

Thieves

Thieves are also great foes of the grain farmer. This has been especially true in modern times when the government has not been stable and efficient, as sometimes under the Turkish rule. Under those conditions, when the crop of grain has been planted a distance from the villages where the Fellahin farmers have lived, or if it was planted near to the territory of some of the wild tribes of Bedouin Arabs, there has been risk of losing the crop or at least a portion of it. In Bible times, Israel many times lost grain to her enemies. This was especially true in the days of the Judges. "And so it was, when Israel had sown, that the Midianites came up, and the Amalekites, and the children of the east" ([Judges 6:3](#)). With enemies nearby, crops may be lost to them, and even the seed is often taken. If therefore the peasant farmer is very poor, and his supply of seed to plant is not large, he would go forth to sow his seed with a certain amount of fear and trembling, wondering if he would get a harvest from his scattering, or if the enemy would take it from him. As the feelings of the Oriental are easily moved, one can imagine him going forth with tears to sow, and if a harvest was actually reaped, what great rejoicing would be his! This is the picture the Psalmist had in mind when he wrote: "They that sow in tears shall reap in joy. He that goeth forth and weepeth, bearing precious seed, shall doubtless come again with rejoicing, bringing his sheaves with him" ([Psa. 126:5, 6](#)).

Rain And The Maturing Of The Crops

The Palestine grainfields are largely dependent upon the rain that falls, for their fruitfulness. No rain falls in the land from May to September. *The former rain*, spoken of in Scripture, falls in the latter part of October or the first part of November usually. It is this rain that is the signal for the farmer to begin his ploughing and plant his seed. The Bible also speaks of the *latter rain*, which ordinarily falls in March and April, and it is this rain that is of so much value in maturing the barley and the wheat crops. The *heavy winter rains* come the latter part of December and during January and February. The prophecy of Joel mentions all three of these kinds of rain: "And he will cause to come down for you the rain, the former rain, and the latter rain in the first month" ([Joel 2:23](#)). The word rain here means heavy, gushing rain that falls in winter months, and the rainy season starts with the former rain in the fall, and ends with the *latter rain* in the spring. Barley harvest is usually in April and May, and wheat harvest in May and June. Thus we see that Jeremiah was quite correct in his order of seasons in relation to the harvest time, when he said: "The harvest is past, the summer is ended, and we are not saved" ([Jer. 8:20](#)).

The Farmer's Law Of Hospitality

Eating Grain In The Field

When the grain in the wheatfield has passed the "milk stage," and has begun to harden, it is then called "fereek" and is considered to be delicious to eat raw. Natives of the land will pluck the heads, and then rub them in their hand and eat them. For centuries the unwritten law of hospitality has been that wayfarers may eat of the wheat as they pass by or through a field, but they must not carry any away with them. The law of God allowed this same privilege. "When thou comest unto the standing corn (i.e. grain) of thy neighbor, then thou mayest pluck the ears with thine hand; but thou shalt not move a sickle unto thy neighbor's standing corn" ([Deut. 23:25](#)). When the Pharisees criticized the disciples, it was not for eating wheat as they passed through a wheat field, but rather for doing it on the sabbath day ([Luke 6:1, 2](#)).

Grain Left For The Poor

The Mosaic Law also had a provision in it to help take care of the poor, in connection with the grain harvest. "And when ye reap the harvest of your land, thou shalt not make clean riddance of the corners of thy field when thou reapest, neither shalt thou gather any gleanings of thy harvest: thou shalt leave them unto the poor, and to the stranger" ([Lev. 23:22](#)). Ruth the Moabitess made use of this provision as a stranger in the land, and so gleaned in the field of Boaz (Ruth, Chapter 2). The Arab farmers of today still carry out this ancient custom, although they may not be acquainted with the Biblical precept concerning it. They would not think of touching the corner of their field when harvesting. It is left for the poor and stranger. It may be collected later into a great heap, but it is then given to the poor, or used to maintain a guest chamber.

Cutting And Transporting The Ripened Grain

Cutting The Ripened Grain

The ripe grain is cut with a sickle. In early times sickles were made of flint, which material was abundant and therefore cheap. In later periods there were some made of bronze or of iron, but the former were more prevalent in all periods. The flint was at first set in the jaw-bone of an animal, or in a curved piece of wood. The prophet Jeremiah speaks of "him that handleth the sickle in the time of harvest" ([Jer. 50:16](#)). And the prophet Joel commands: "Put ye in the sickle, for the harvest is ripe" ([Joel 3:13](#)).

Binding The Grain Into Sheaves

The cut grain is gathered on the arms and bound into sheaves. The Psalmist makes reference to the mower filling his hand, and the binder of sheaves filling his bosom ([Psa. 129:7](#)). And Song of Solomon speaks of an heap of wheat ([Cant. 7:2](#)), and Joseph in his dream saw "binding sheaves in the field" ([Gen. 37:7](#)). Thus the cut grain was gathered in the arms and bound into sheaves.

Transportation Of Grain To The Threshing Floor



Carrying Sheaves to the Threshing Floor

Picture:

Carrying Sheaves to the Threshing Floor

The usual method of transporting the grain to the threshing floor is as follows: two large bundles of the grain are made secure by a network of rope and then placed a few feet apart. Then a camel is made to kneel in the space between them, and then the bundles are fastened to the animal's packsaddle. The driver gives his signal, and the camel rises and begins to march off to the threshing floor, which is usually located not far from the village. Here he kneels again and is relieved of his burden of grain, and goes back for another load. When a camel was to be had, this was the method of transportation that was doubtless used in Bible times. Otherwise the mule, used donkey was utilized for the purpose. When sheaves of grain are loaded on the donkey, a sort of cradle is suspended to the flat saddle, and the cut grain is thrown over this and tied by a rope. The brothers of Joseph used asses to carry sacks of grain and also straw for them to eat ([Gen. 42:26, 27](#)).

Threshing The Grain

Threshing Floor

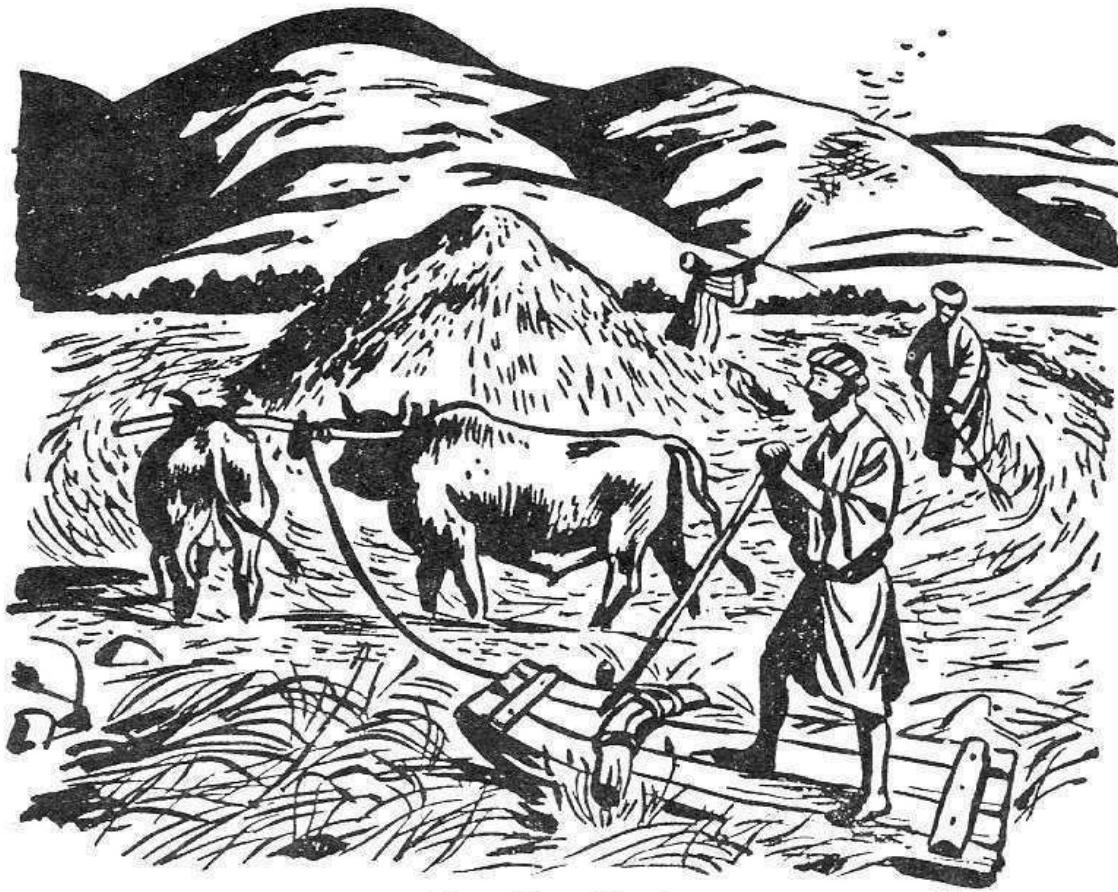
A typical Oriental threshing floor has been described by Thomson thus:

The construction of the floors is very simple. A circular space, from thirty to fifty feet in diameter, is made level, if not naturally so, and the ground is smoothed off and beaten solid, that the earth may not mingle with the grain in threshing. In time, the floors, especially on the mountains, are covered with a tough, hard sward, the prettiest, and often the only, green plots about the village, and there the traveller delights to pitch his tent. Daniel calls them summer threshing floors; and this is the most appropriate name for them, since they are only used in that season of the year.

Methods Of Threshing

Three methods of threshing were in use in ancient times, and in some places in the East today. (1) A *flail* was used for threshing small quantities of grain. Ruth must have used such a wooden instrument. "And beat out that she had gleaned: and it was about an ephah of barley" ([Ruth 2:17](#)). And without doubt Gideon was also using such an instrument when he was threshing a small amount of wheat secretly, for fear of the enemy. "Gideon was beating out wheat in the winepress, to hide it from the Midianites" ([Judges 6:11](#), A. R. V.).

(2) A threshing instrument was often used.



Threshing Grain

Picture:

Threshing Grain One type that has been used in Bible lands in modern days, is composed of two wooden planks joined together, about three feet wide and six feet long, and underneath has rows of cut square holes, and sharp stones or pieces of metal are driven into these. Isaiah well describes such a threshing instrument: "Behold, I will make thee a new sharp threshing instrument having teeth" ([Isa. 41:15](#), A. R. V.). This threshing board is pulled by the oxen over the grain, and the thresher sits or stands upon the instrument, with his goad in his hand to hurry up the animals. Another type of threshing instrument takes the form of a small wagon with low cylindrical wheels that serve as saws. The prophet must have been thinking of this sort of instrument when he mentioned "the cart wheel" in connection with the threshing activity of the farmer ([Isa. 28:27, 28](#)).

(3) The oxen alone were driven over the grain in order to thresh it. This method was the most common method used by the Jews in Old Testament times. The animals were turned over the layer of grain as it lay upon the threshing floor, and their hoofs did the work of threshing. Many of the Fellahin today will say that this is the best way of threshing. "This must have been the same in Bible days, for the Hebrew verb 'to thresh' is *doosh*, which has as its root-meaning 'to trample down', 'to tread under foot'" (cf. [Job 39:15](#); [Dan. 7:23](#)).

The Oxen Not Muzzled While Threshing

Even today the Arab peasant farmer does not muzzle his oxen while they are treading the grain on the threshing floor. He says it would be a great sin to do so. This agrees with the teaching of the Mosaic Law. "Thou shalt not muzzle the ox when he treadeth out the corn [grain]" ([Deut. 25:4](#)). The Apostle Paul quotes this Scripture to enforce his argument that "the laborer is worthy of his hire" ([1Cor. 9:9](#); [1Tim. 5:18](#)).

What The Threshing Process Accomplishes

What happens has been described as follows:

As these heavy sledges are drawn over the layer of straw and ears, they rub out the grain. This by its form and weight, sinks immediately through the straw, and thus escapes being hurt. The straw, which by its lightness remains on the surface, is slowly broken and crushed into tiny pieces. Thus a double process goes on by means of this simple but effective treatment. Not only is the corn threshed out, but the straw is at the same time prepared for cattle and camel fodder. In this crushed state it is called "teben" and is used to mix with the barley with which all their animals are fed, just as we mix chopped hay with oats; but this crushing is far superior to our chopping as a means of preparing cattle food.

Winnowing The Grain

Winnowing was accomplished by the use of either a broad shovel or of a wooden fork which had bent prongs. With this instrument, the mass of chaff, straw, and grain was thrown against the wind. Because there was generally a breeze blowing in the evening, this was the time when it was normally done. So Naomi Said to Ruth concerning Boaz: "Behold, he winnoweth barley tonight in the threshing floor" ([Ruth 3:2](#)).

When the Bible speaks of the farmer's fan, it does not mean that some instrument was used to increase the wind. Rather, the fan was the shovel or wooden fork used when unseparated grain and straw was thrown against the wind. The prophet Jeremiah tells of God using a fan to winnow His people Israel: I have winnowed them with a fan in the gates of the land" ([Jer. 15:7](#), A. R. V.).

When the grain and straw, not as yet separated, are thrown into the air, the wind causes the mass of material to fall as follows: Since the grain is the heaviest, it naturally falls beneath the fan. The straw is blown to the side into a heap, and the lighter chaff and the dust are carried beyond into a flattened windrow. This gave to the Psalmist his figure: "The ungodly are not so, but are like the chaff which the wind driveth away" ([Psa. 1:4](#)). The chaff is burned as Scripture often indicates. "And the flame consumeth the chaff" ([Isa. 5:24](#)). John the Baptist was familiar with the winnowing process and the burning of the chaff. He said: "Whose fan is in his hand, and he will thoroughly purge his floor, and gather his wheat into the garner; but he will burn up the chaff with unquenchable fire" ([Matt. 3:12](#); [Luke 3:17](#)).

Dr. Lambie reports seeing an additional process used by Bible land Arabs. After being thrown against the wind, the grain is placed on a rock and the farmer uses a mat about eighteen inches square with which to fan the grain, while a helper keeps turning it over, in order to get rid of any remaining chaff. There is no definite reference to such a practice in the Bible, but it is possible this method may have been used in olden times as an additional means of cleaning the grain, or perhaps it was employed when the winds were quiet.

Sifting The Grain

When the winnowing process is over, then comes the sifting of the grain. The wheat or barley will still be more or less mixed with certain amounts of chaff, little stones, and perhaps some tares. Sifting is therefore necessary before the grain can be ground into meal. This is the task of the women. The sifter seats herself on the floor, and shakes the sieve which contains the grain, until the chaff begins to appear on the top, and this is blown away by lung power. The stones are removed as are also the tares. The Lord Jesus made reference to the "sifting" of Simon Peter. He said: "Simon, Simon, behold, Satan hath desired to have you, that he may sift you as wheat: But I have prayed for thee, that thy faith fail not; and when thou art converted, strengthen thy brethren" ([Luke 22:31](#)).

Storing The Grain

Smaller quantities of grain are often stored away for future use by the family, in "barrels" made of a combination of clay and wickerwork. If there is a larger quantity of grain it is sometimes placed in a dry cistern under the ground, and the location of the place is kept a secret by covering over the opening. Actually there were no flour *barrels* in the homes of Old Testament characters. The Revisers have correctly changed the word "barrel" to "jar." Earthenware jars were used to store grain or flour. see ([1Kings 17:12, 14, 16](#); [1Kings 18:33](#), A. R. V.).

Both underground storage places for grain and buildings above ground have been in use in modern times. In the Bible, three words are used in our English translations for grain storage places: the storehouse, the garner, and the barn ([Deut. 28:8](#); [Matt. 3:12](#); [Prov. 3:10](#)). These places were often located below the surface of the ground, but were sometimes above ground. The barns of the rich fool Christ told about, must have been of the latter type, because he said: "I will pull down my barns and build greater" ([Luke 12:18](#)). When excavators uncovered the city of Gezer, they discovered that granaries had been important buildings in ancient times. Some of them were connected with private homes, while others were evidently public storehouses. Most of them were circular in shape, like some that have been in use on the maritime plain of Palestine in recent years. Their size varied greatly.

CHAPTER 20

CARE OF VINEYARDS

The Description Of A Vineyard By Isaiah And By Jesus

IN ISAIAH'S PARABLE of the Vineyard, and in Christ's Parable of the Wicked Husbandman, taken together, we get an accurate picture of an Oriental vineyard. Isaiah wrote: "My well beloved had a vineyard in a very fruitful hill: and he digged it, and gathered out the stones thereof, and planted it with the choicest vine, and built a tower in the midst of it, and also hewed out a winepress therein" ([Isa. 5:1-2](#), A. R. V.). Jesus spoke thus: "There was a certain householder, which planted a vineyard, and hedged it round about, and digged a winepress in it, and built a tower, and let it out to husbandman" ([Matt. 21:33](#)). These two accounts list eight interesting facts that are true of many vineyards in Bible lands. They are often located on a hillside, they usually have a hedge or fence around them, the soil is cultivated by hoeing or spading, large stones are gathered out of the ground, choice vines are planted, a watchtower is built, a winepress is constructed, and sometimes vineyards are rented. These points suggest the main features that need to be noticed in a study of the Oriental vineyard.

Location Of Vineyards

Hillsides Often Used

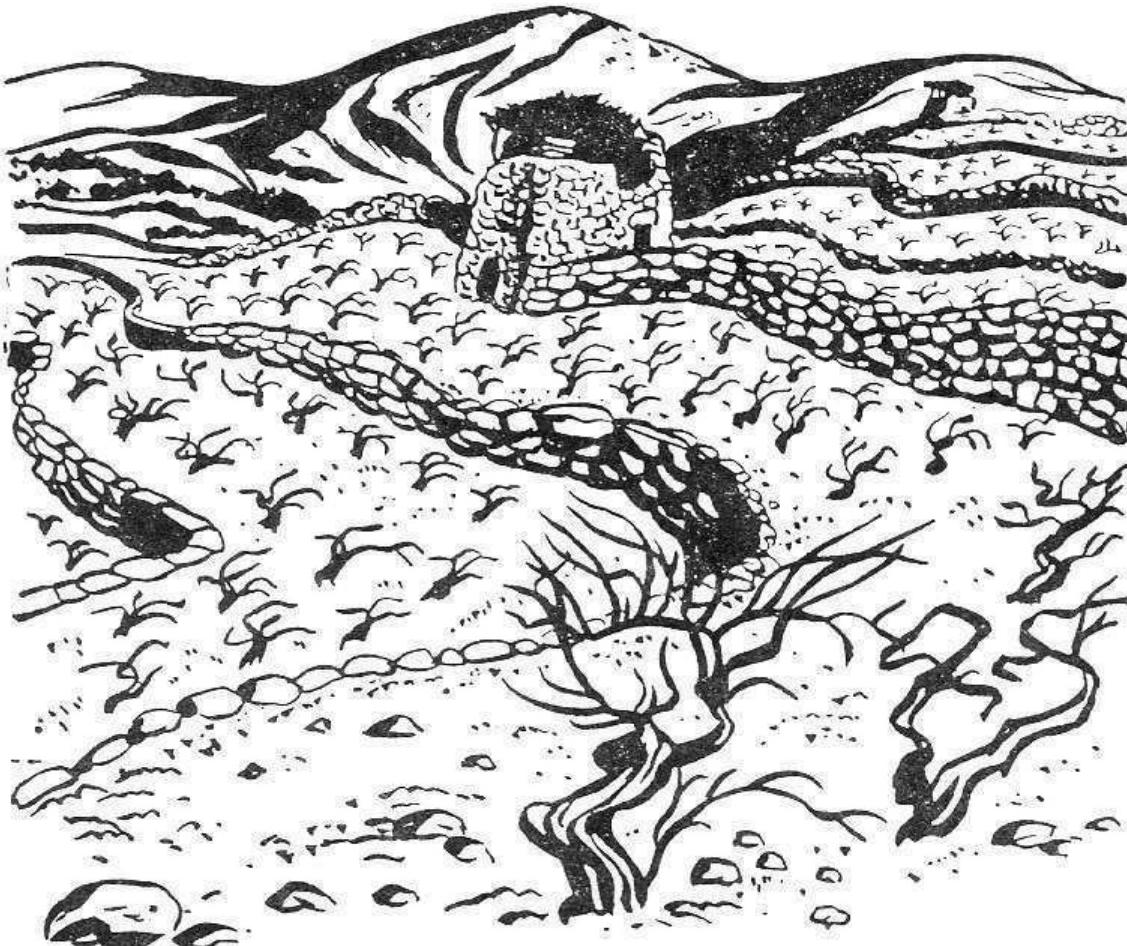
Although vineyards are to be found in various locations in Palestine, it has been customary during past years for the hillsides to be utilized for the purpose, or the ground at the foot of a hill that slopes gently. Grapevines like a sandy or loose soil. They need plenty of sunshine and air by day, and dew by night, and their roots will penetrate deep crevices of rock to get nourishment. It was "in a very fruitful hill" that Isaiah's vineyard grew ([Isa. 5:1](#)).

Sections Where Most Of The Grapes Grow

The favorite places for vineyards in Bible lands are Southern Palestine, especially in the vicinity of Hebron where there are many hillsides; and in Syria and the foothills of the Lebanon Mountains in the north. It has been reported that one variety of grape grown in the vicinity of Hebron sometimes develops fruit so that one bunch may weigh as much as twenty-four pounds. Two natives will carry such a bunch on a pole, which reminds us of the spies sent by Moses into Canaan. "And they came unto the brook Eshcol, and cut down from thence a branch with one cluster of grapes, and they bare it between two upon a staff" ([Num. 13:23](#)).

Preparation For A Vineyard

Terraces Necessary For Many Vineyards



Terraced Vineyard

Picture:

Terraced Vineyard

This has to do with those located on the hillsides. A series of low stone walls above each other, are constructed along the side of the hill, to keep the soil in place, and at the right level for growing grapes. Remains of old terraces in various places indicate that this custom has been practiced for many centuries.

A Hedge Or Wall Usually Built Around A Vineyard

An Eastern vineyard is usually surrounded with a ditch, and the earth from the digging of it is thrown along the inner side of the ditch, and upon this a fence of posts, branches, and twigs is built with thorn-branches on top. Oftentimes a wall of either stones or sun-dried mud takes the place of the fence. This serves as protection from foxes, jackals, or other animals, as well as from any thieves. In the parable of Jesus, the owner of the vineyard "hedged it round about" ([Matt. 21:33](#)). The Psalmist recounted what would happen to a vineyard whose hedges were broken down: "Why hast thou then broken down the hedges, so that all they which pass by the way do pluck her? The boar out of the wood doth waste it, and the wild beast of the field doth devour it" ([Psa. 80:12, 13](#)). The lover in the Song of Solomon speaks of "the foxes, the little foxes, that spoil the vines" ([Cant. 2:15](#)).

Large Stones Gathered Out Of The Land

After putting a hedge or wall around the vineyard, the next task is to gather out stones. Isaiah's parable says: "And he fenced it, and gathered out the stones thereof" ([Isa. 5:2](#)). It is not the small stones that are taken out, because their presence is important to aid in the retaining of moisture in the vineyard's soil. Rather the large boulders must be removed that would be a hindrance to the growing vines. Much of Palestine's land has had these rocks present, and they must be laboriously moved in preparation for a crop of grapes.

The Soil Prepared For Planting

The ground for hillside vineyards is not usually ploughed on account of its rocky character. Rather is the more arduous method of hoeing or spading by hand used. Isaiah pictures the process of cultivation of the soil in the words, "and he digged it" ([Isa. 5:2](#), A. R. V.). If the farmer in charge of the vineyard does not have a small vineyard, he will probably need to have some workmen to help him, as was the case of the householder in Christ's Parable of the Laborers in the Vineyard ([Matt. 20:1-3](#)), and in such a case it is to the marketplace that he will go to secure his workers.

The Construction Of A Booth Or Tower



Vineyard Watch-Tower

Picture:

Vineyard Watch-Tower

For centuries Palestinian vineyards have had watchmen, whose duty it has been to be on the lookout for marauders of any kind. Sometimes a simple booth is constructed for him, on a high spot where he can view the entire vineyard. This is made of branches and boughs of trees, and provides a shelter from the rays of the sun. This place becomes the home for the watchman for the summer months of the year. In the winter months this booth is deserted. Isaiah said: "The daughter of Zion is left as a booth in a vineyard" ([Isa. 1:8](#), A. R. V.). Often a more durable abode is made for the watchman, especially if his family is to live with him for the summer. Isaiah's Song of the Vineyard mentions the building of a tower "in the midst" of the vineyard ([Isa. 5:2](#)). Jesus' Parable of the Wicked Husbandmen speaks of the building of a tower in the vineyard ([Matt. 21:33](#)). Also when Christ told of the man who did not count the cost of building a tower, it was doubtless a vineyard-tower to which he was referring ([Luke 14:28-30](#)). These towers were of varying height, all the way from ten feet to an occasional forty feet. These towers were not the same as the ones connected with the city walls. Nor are they the same as the more modern towers now in use by the Jews returning to the land of their fathers, who use them as a protection for their agricultural colonies.

Planting Of The Grapevines

The vineyard of Isaiah's song was planted, "with the choicest vine" ([Isa. 5:2](#)). Although the slips are usually planted closer together, they are sometimes set about twelve feet apart in order to give plenty of space for the branches to run. As a rule the young vine is trimmed back and does not bear grapes until following the third year. The grape blossom comes out in April and May and gives out a delicate sweetness. Solomon's Song says: "The vines with the tender grape give a good smell" ([Cant. 2:13](#)).

Care Of A Vineyard

Parable Of The Sluggard

A good indication of the care required in growing a vineyard may be derived by looking at this parable as given in the book of Proverbs. "I went by the field of the slothful, and by the vineyard of the man void of understanding; and, lo, it was all grown over with thorns, and nettles had covered the face thereof, and the stone wall thereof was broken down" ([Prov. 24:30, 31](#)). The sluggard failed to keep his vineyard-wall in repair, and he failed to keep his growing vines free of thorns and weeds. These two activities are absolutely necessary. As in the case of raising a crop of grain, the native farmer does not usually fertilize the ground of his vineyard. Liming of the ground is dependent upon the many small and soft limestones so often present in Palestine. Some of the lime in the stones is dissolved with each rainstorm, and mixing with the soil helps it in the growth of the grapes.

Pruning Of The Grapevines

Before the arrival of springtime, the keeper of the vineyard prunes off every superficial branch, every branch that is sickly or feeble, so that the sap may flow into the healthy ones that will bear fruit. The branch that is located nearest the trunk or root usually bears the most grapes. Jesus indicates his familiarity with the pruning of the grapevines, in his famous allegory of the vine and the branches: "I am the real vine, and my Father is the cultivator. He cuts away any branch on me that stops bearing fruit, and He repeatedly prunes every branch that continues to bear fruit, to make it bear more. You are already pruned because of the teaching that I have given you" ([John 15:1-3](#), Williams).

Harvesting Of Grapes

The vintage begins in the month of September in the Holy Land, and at this period, from ancient times, the inhabitants of many a village move out to the vineyards, where they live in tents or in lodges. Concerning the men of Shechem, the Book of Judges says: "They went out into the fields, and gathered their vineyards" ([Judges 9:27](#)). Jeremiah tells us about the gathering of the grapes by means of baskets: "Turn back thine hand as a grape-gatherer into the baskets" ([Jer. 6:9](#)). Isaiah predicts judgment as being a time when "there shall be no singing" in the vineyards ([Isa. 16:10](#)). Thus the gathering of the grapes into the baskets was done with great joy and much singing. Whole families entered into the happiness of this harvest time. This is true among Oriental grape farmers today.

Use Of Grapes And Making Of Grape Products

Fresh Grapes And Raisins

During the months of September and October, the fresh ripe grapes are eaten along with bread as one of the principal foods, in Bible lands. Then the grapes are dried in a level corner of the vineyard. While being dried they are turned over and sprinkled with olive oil to keep the skin moist. Then they are stored for winter use.

The Mosaic Law allowed the eating of grapes from a neighbor's vineyard, but none could be taken away in a vessel ([Deut. 23:24](#)). Today, in the Arab villages of Palestine, there is an unwritten law of hospitality that everyone passing by a vineyard may help himself, but nobody would think of imposing on this kindness by carrying off any grapes.

Raisins were widely used in the days when the ancient Hebrews lived in Palestine. Abigail gave David one hundred clusters of raisins ([1Sam. 25:18](#)). Raisins were brought to David at Hebron ([1Chron. 12:40](#)), and again, when he was fleeing from Absalom, he received a quantity of them ([2Sam. 16:1](#)).

Grape Syrup Or dibs

The Arabs take the juice of grapes, and boil it until it is as thick as molasses. They call this "dibs," and they are very fond of eating it with bread, or they thin it with water and drink it. This grapehoney was in use in Bible times. It was probably this that Jacob sent to Joseph in Egypt ([Gen. 43:11](#)), and which was purchased by the Tyrians from the land of Palestine ([Ezek. 27:17](#)). Three hundred pounds of grapes will make one hundred pounds of dibs.

The Oriental Winepress



The Winepress

Picture:

The Winepress

The winepress of Isaiah's parable was constructed by hewing it out of rock ([Isa. 5:2](#), A. R. V.). Those seen today are composed of two depressions hewn out of solid rock. The one is higher than the other one, and is also larger. The grapes are put into this one, and then trodden by the feet of men, women, and also children, usually whole families working together. The juice flows into the lower depression. Usually each vineyard of any size has its own winepress. This work of treading the grapes was customarily accompanied by shouts and songs of happiness. Jeremiah speaks of judgment in terms of the absence of this happiness. "And joy and gladness is taken from the plentiful field, and from the land of Moab; and I have caused wine to fail from the winepresses: none shall tread with shouting; their shouting shall be no shouting" ([Jer. 48:33](#)).

The Winepress As A Figure Of Divine Judgment

Isaiah describes the nations as being put in God's winepress where He treads upon them until His garments are sprinkled with their lifeblood ([Isa. 63:3-6](#)). There is a graphic picture of the destruction of the army of Antichrist in the Apocalypse. The coming Redeemer is described as being "clothed with a vesture dipped in blood," and He is said to tread "the winepress of the fierceness and wrath of Almighty God" ([Rev. 19:13, 15](#)).

The Renting Of A Vineyard

Vineyards that are large are often rented out to one or more families. When this is done, the peasant who rents the vineyard agrees to give half or more of the products of the grapes. When harvest-time comes, the owner will send his servant to secure his share of the grapes, raisins, wine, or dibs . This illustrates Christ's Parable of the Wicked Husbandmen, for Jesus in telling his parables was making use of familiar practices among the people. "There was a certain householder, which planted a vineyard . . . and let it out to husbandman, and went into a far country: and when the time of the fruit drew near, he sent his servants to the husbandmen, that they might receive the fruits of it" ([Matt. 21:33, 34](#)).

CHAPTER 21

OLIVE AND FIG TREE CULTURE

The Olive Tree

ABUNDANCE OF OLIVE TREES IN BIBLE LANDS. For centuries the olive tree has been growing in lands bordering on the Mediterranean Sea, but its growth in Palestine has been quite abundant. Moses told Israel that Canaan was "a land of oil olive" ([Deut. 8:8](#)). He also told them that they would acquire olive trees which they had not planted ([Deut. 6:11](#)). From that day down to the present day, the growth of the olive tree, and the use of its products, have played an important part in the history of the land.

Characteristics Of The Olive Tree

The young olive tree only bears olives after seven years of growth, and it is about fourteen years before the crop reaches its maturity. Because of the injurious method of harvesting the olives by using sticks to knock off the fruit, the trees only bear a full crop every other year. Some twenty gallons of oil are often derived from the olives of one tree. The berries are harvested in the month of October.

After the olive tree reaches its maturity, its fruitfulness lasts for many years. Its longevity is one of the remarkable characteristics of the tree. It lives and bears fruit for centuries. The old olive tree is often seen to have several thrifty young shoots springing up all around it from its roots. It was this picture that the Psalmist had in mind when he wrote: "Thy children like olive plants round about thy table" ([Psa. 128:3](#)).

The olive tree thrives in Palestinian soil which has so many rocks in it. Thomson says of it: "It insinuates its roots into the crevices of this flinty marl, and draws from thence its stores of oil." Doubtless it is to this that the song of Moses alludes: "He made him to suck honey out of the rock, and oil out of the flinty rock" ([Deut. 32:13](#)).

To the Occidental, the olive tree with its dull grayish color of foliage, does not seem to be a particularly beautiful tree, but the Oriental sees in it many charms. Writers of Scripture often speak of the beauty and attractiveness of the olive. Concerning Israel, the prophet Jeremiah said: "The Lord called thy name, A green olive tree, fair, and of goodly fruit" ([Jer. 11:16](#)). The prophet Hosea said, "His beauty shall be as the olive tree" ([Hosea 14:6](#)). And David asserted concerning himself: "I am like a green olive tree in the house of God" ([Psa. 52:8](#)).

Olive trees have a remarkable number of blossoms, many of which fall without ever maturing into fruit. Sometimes the breeze blows upon the tree and the falling blossoms look like a shower of snowflakes. The book of Job makes a comparison to this characteristic of the olive blossoms: "And shall cast off his flower as the olive" ([Job 15:33](#)).

Grafting Of The Olive Tree

In the western part of Asia the olive tree often grows wild, and so when the trees are cultivated they must be grafted. A graft of a cultivated olive tree is inserted into the stem of the wild olive tree, and then the wild olive tree is cut down close to the ground, and the part below becomes root and feeder for the inserted shoot. This is the customary process of grafting. But the Apostle Paul, for sake of argument, speaks of grafting contrary to the natural process. He tells of God grafting the wild olive of the Gentiles on the good stock of the Jewish nation, which is a reversal of custom ([Rom. 11:24](#)).

Harvesting The Olive Crop

The Arabs harvest their crop of olives in the Holy Land by beating the trees with sticks in order to knock off the fruit. Instead of hand picking them, they beat the limbs and thus cause the fruit to fall. The tender shoots that would ordinarily bear fruit the following year are thus apt to be damaged, so as to interfere greatly with the next year's crop. This is no doubt the reason for the trees yielding a good crop only every other year. The reason why this method is used is because their forefathers have always done it this way, and they don't believe in change of customs. As a matter of fact, Moses indicates that the same method was used by Israel when he gave the law concerning leaving some of the olive berries for the poor: "When thou beatest thine olive tree thou shalt not go over the boughs again: it shall be for the stranger, or the fatherless, and for the widow" ([Deut. 24:20](#)). Isaiah also speaks of the obtaining of berries left by the olive harvesters: "Yet gleaning grapes shall be left in it, as the shaking of an olive tree, two or three berries in the top of the uppermost bough, four or five in the outmost fruitful branches thereof" ([Isa. 17:6](#)).

Use Of Olives For Eating

The natives of Bible lands have made large use of a form of dried olives. The pickled olive berry so much used in the Occident, is gradually being introduced by the returning Jews. It has been said that bread and olives are used in Syria today, much like porridge and milk are used in Scotland. The workingman of the East usually has some olives in his bag when he leaves home for his daily work.

The Process Of Making Olive Oil

Olive mills are used for making oil. There have been many of these instruments for the manufacture of oil located in Palestine.

Oil-presses comprised, in addition to the vat, an upright stone with a large hole in it. In this hole a beam was inserted. This beam rested on the olives which were to be pressed, extending far beyond the receptacle containing the olives, and weights were hung on the end farthest from the stone.

The Garden of Gethsemane was in reality an olive orchard, and the word, "Gethsemane," means "Oil-Press." Another Bible-time way of making oil was to tread the olive berries with the feet. This primitive method was mentioned by the prophet Micah: "Thou shalt tread the olives, but thou shalt not anoint thee with oil" ([Micah 6:15](#)).

The Wide Use Of Olive Oil In Bible Lands

Olive oil was considered to be one of the great sources of wealth in the days of King Solomon (cf. [1Kings 5:11](#); [2Chron. 2:10](#)). Solomon gave to Hiram each year in return for services rendered by his men, among other things, twenty thousand baths of oil, one bath being about seven and one-half gallons. The prophets Ezekiel and Hosea make mention of the exporting of oil to other lands ([Ezek. 27:17](#); [Hosea 12:1](#)). Oil has been used for a great variety of purposes in the Orient. It largely took the place of butter in eating, and for cooking purposes it was used in place of animal fat. Ezekiel mentions three important items of diet of which oil is one, and flour and honey are the other two ([Ezek. 16:13](#)). And olive oil was used almost exclusively for light in lamps. The most famous example of this is "the ten virgins, which took their lamps, and went forth to meet the bridegroom" ([Matt. 25:1](#)). Also oil is used today in Bible lands in the manufacture of soap, and it is quite likely that it was so used in Bible days. And oil was often used for anointing the body. Naomi told Ruth, "Wash thyself therefore, and anoint thee, and put thy raiment upon thee, and get thee down to the floor" ([Ruth 3:3](#)). Then oil was many times used in various religious ceremonies. It formed a part of the meal offering ([Lev. 2:1](#), A. R. V.). The prophet was anointed with oil when he took over his duties ([1Kings 19:16](#)). The priest was also anointed with oil when he took over his duties ([Lev. 8:12](#)). And the king was anointed either by a prophet or by the priest ([1Sam. 16:13](#); [1Sam. 1 Kings 1:34](#)). In New Testament times the sick were anointed for the healing of their bodies ([Mark 6:13](#); [Jas. 5:14](#)).

The Use Of Olive Wood

Wood from the olive tree is often used in the East. It is close-grained and has a yellow tint. The Oriental carpenter is fond of using it. It is especially utilized in the construction of cabinets. King Solomon had the cherubim of the temple, and the inner and outer doors and posts of the sanctuary, all made of olive wood ([1Kings 6:23, 31, 33](#)).

The Symbolic Meaning Of The Olive

The olive tree has been thought of as a symbol of peace, ever since the dove sent out by Noah from the ark came back, and "Lo, in her mouth an olive leaf plucked off" ([Gen. 8:11](#)). Throughout the Bible, oil is often used symbolically of the Holy Spirit. And when the Apostle John speaks of the "anointing which ye have received" ([1John 2:27](#)), he means by it the endowment with power of the Holy Spirit. Also oil was considered a symbol of abundance ([Deut. 8:8](#)), and a lack of it was a symbol of want ([Joel 1:10](#)).

The Fig Tree

Three Crops Of Figs In Palestine

The early figs, not very many in number, but large in size, are ripe a month before the main crop; the summer or main crop is used in August and September; and the winter figs remain on the trees until late in the fall of the year. Mention is made in Scripture of the firstripe figs as being desirable ([Hosea 9:10](#)), and the ease with which they are secured when the tree is shaken ([Nahum 3:12](#)). The summer crop that is not eaten as fresh fruit is dried on the housetops, and then used in the winter months.

The Fig Tree A Sign Of The Season

The fig tree shows sign of foliage later than some of the other fruit trees of Palestine. The unfolding of the fig leaves and the deepening of their color is thought of as a sign that summertime is at hand. Jesus made reference to this idea: "Now learn a parable of the fig tree; when his branch is yet tender, and putteth forth leaves, ye know that summer is nigh" ([Matt. 24:32](#); [Mark 13:28](#)). The lover in the Song of Solomon indicated that winter was past and summer was at hand because "the fig tree putteth forth her green figs" ([Cant. 2:11-13](#)).

Christ And The Fig Tree

In order to understand why Christ cursed the fig tree one day, it is necessary to know the custom of the fig tree's growth of leaves and fruit. The normal habit of the fig trees is that fruit begins to form on the tree as soon as leaves appear. Leaves and fruit also disappear together. But it was said of this fig tree which Jesus and his disciples saw on the Mount of Olives, "for the time of figs was not yet" ([Mark 11:13](#)). Actually this was no excuse for this fig tree, because if it was not the time for figs, it was also not the time for leaves to appear. By a show of leaves, it was like many people, pretending to have fruit which was not there. It was like the Pharisees who professed to be very religious, but whose lives were fruitless. Therefore Christ cursed this tree as an object lesson to all not to be hypocritical.

Jesus also gave us the Parable of the Barren Fig Tree.

A certain man had a fig tree planted in his vineyard; and he came and sought fruit thereon, and found none. Then said he unto the dresser of his vineyard, Behold, these three years I come seeking fruit on this fig tree, and find none: cut it down; why cumbereth it the ground? And he answering said unto him, Lord, let it alone this year also, till I shall dig about it, and dung it: and if it bear fruit, well: and if not, then after that thou shalt cut it down ([Luke 13:6-9](#)).

Here was a fig tree that failed for three years to bear fruit, when its owner had a right to expect a crop. The gardener suggested patience with the tree, and proposed additional cultivation and fertilization for it, giving it another chance to bear figs. It will be noted that this fig tree had been planted in the midst of a vineyard. This is often done in Palestine.

Use Of Figs In The Old Testament

Figs were often used in the history of Israel, especially dried figs. Abigail took two hundred cakes of figs to David ([1Sam. 25:18](#)). A cake of figs was given the Egyptian to revive him ([1Sam. 30:12](#)). And cakes of figs were brought to David at Hebron at a time of great rejoicing ([1Chron. 12:40](#)). When King Hezekiah was sick, Isaiah told him to put a lump of figs on his boil, and the Lord healed him ([2Kings 20:7](#)). Jeremiah refers to the characteristic of figs, that some of them can be very good, and then again, they can be very bad ([Jer. 24:1, 2](#)).

Sitting Under One's Own Fig Tree

Several times the Old Testament makes use of this expression with the addition of the vine. It is used in various ways. In the prosperous reign of King Solomon it was said, "And Judah and Israel dwelt safely, every man under his vine and under his fig tree, from Dan even to Beer-sheba, all the days of Solomon" ([1Kings 4:25](#)). This was another way of saying that there was prosperity and peace in the land, that every family enjoyed the possession of his father's inheritance, which was symbolized by the fruits of the vine and fig tree belonging to each home. The prophet Micah used the expression to picture the universal peace and prosperity which would characterize the coming Golden Age: "Nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war any more. But they shall sit every man under his vine and under his fig tree; and none shall make them afraid" ([Micah 4:3, 4](#)). It is a picture of enjoying the blessings of peace.

CHAPTER 22

TRADES AND PROFESSIONS

The Potter

THE GREAT DEMAND FOR POTTERS IN THE ORIENT. This is because copper vessels are so expensive, because leather bottles are not suitable for some domestic purposes, and because earthenware vessels are so easily broken and must therefore be replaced often. Porous earthenware jars are in much demand to keep drinking-water cool through the process of evaporation. In a warm climate, courtesy usually demands that "a cup of *cold* water" be given ([Matt. 10:42](#)).

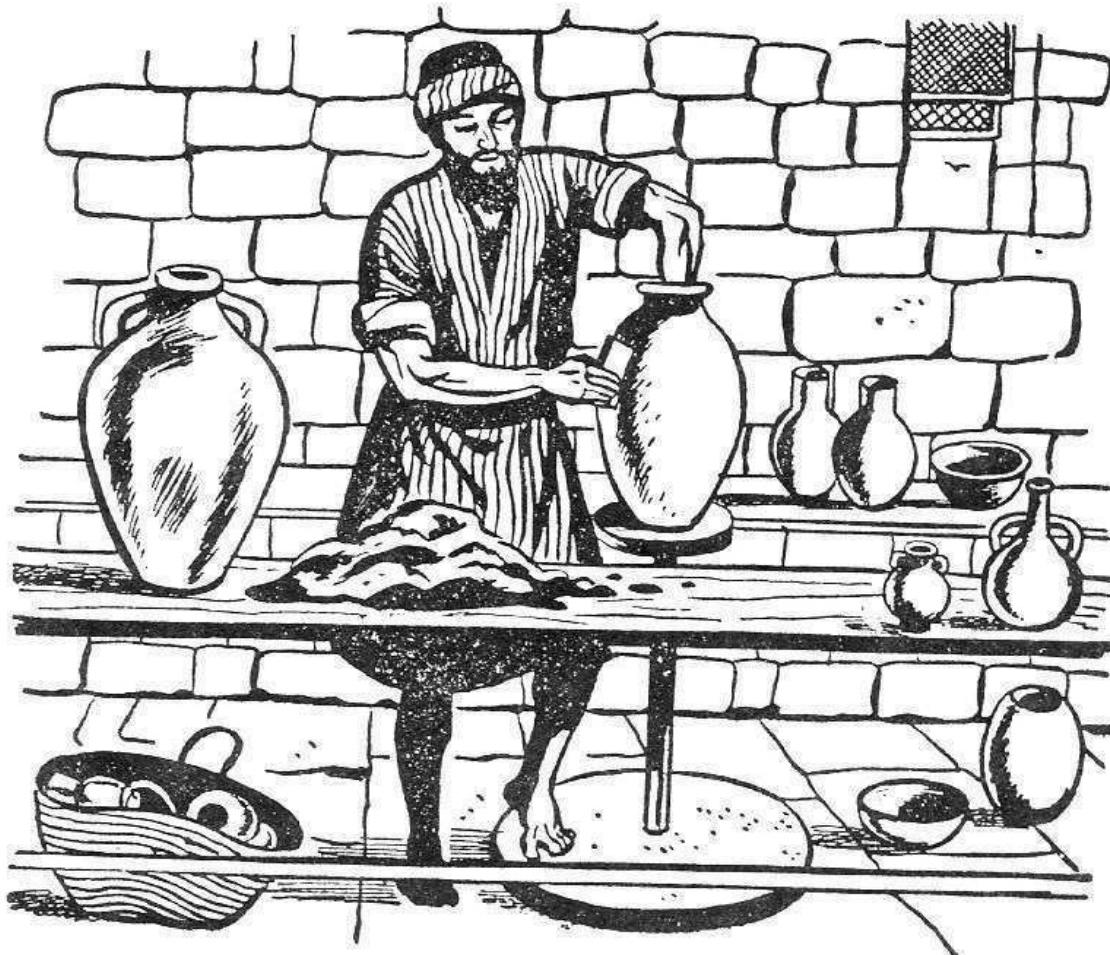
Ceramic Quarters In Jerusalem

The prophet Jeremiah speaks of visiting one potter in Jerusalem, but the writer of Chronicles tells of a ceramic quarter in the city. "These were the potters . . . there they dwelt with the king for his work" ([1Chron. 4:23](#)). Thus it would seem that there were in ancient times families or guilds of potters, and also royal potters.

Preparation Of The Clay For The Potter

It was trodden by the feet in order that it might become of the right consistency. The prophet Isaiah speaks of this action when he says: "He shall come upon princes as upon mortar, and as the potter treadeth clay" ([Isa. 41:25](#)).

The Equipment And Method Of The Potter



The Potter at His Wheel

Potter at His Wheel

Picture: The

Today the potter plies his trade in many sections of the East, just like his predecessors have done for centuries. His workshop is very rude. He works behind a coarse wooden bench. His equipment consists of two wooden discs or wheels, with an axle standing up from the center of the lower disc. The upper wheel thus turns horizontally when the lower one is put into action by the foot. He keeps a heap of clay lying on his bench, and from this he places a lump of clay that has been previously softened, upon the upper wheel. He makes this wheel spin around, as he shapes the clay with his hands into a cone shaped figure. Then he uses his thumb to make a hole in the top of the whirling clay, and keeps opening it until he can put his left hand inside of it. As it is necessary, he sprinkles the clay with water from a vessel which he keeps beside him.

He uses a small piece of wood with his right hand to smooth the outside of the vessel as it continues to rotate. He is thus able to make

the vessel into whatever shape he desires in keeping with his individual skill

Jeremiah referred to the work of the potter in his message, the inspiration of which came while he was visiting the potter's house: "O house of Israel, cannot I do with you as the potter? saith the Lord. Behold, as the clay is in the potter's hand, so are ye in mine hand, O house of Israel" ([Jer. 18:6](#)). The Apocrypha contains an interesting description of the potter and his work in that day:

So is the potter sitting at his work, and turning the wheel about with his feet, who is always anxiously set at his work, and all his handiwork is by number; he will fashion the clay with his arm, and he will bend its strength in front of his feet; he will apply his heart to finish the glazing; and will be wakeful to make clean the furnace ([Ecclesiasticus 38:29, 30](#)).

Marring The Vessel

Dr. Thomson visited a large pottery at Jaffa and watched a potter work much like the one whom Jeremiah saw in his visit to the potter's house. The prophet of old noted one thing: "And the vessel that he made of clay was marred in the hand of the potter: so he made it again another vessel, as seemed good to the potter to make it" ([Jer. 18:4](#)). The Palestinian missionary says he had to wait a long while before he saw the same thing happen, but at last it did. Perhaps because of some defect in the clay, or because he had used too little of it, the potter very suddenly crushed the jar that had been progressing, into a shapeless mass of mud; and then, starting all over again, he set out to make something different." Paul refers to such action in his Epistle to the Romans, "Shall the thing formed say to him that formed it, Why hast thou made me thus? Hath not the potter power over the clay, of the same lump to make one vessel unto honor, and another unto dishonor?" ([Rom. 9:20, 21](#)).

Baking The Pottery

After the potter is through working with the vessel on the wheel, he places it on a shelf where there are rows of other vessels, and where they are kept from the direct rays of the sun, and yet where they are exposed to the wind from all directions. The brick kiln where they are baked is a shallow well of stone or brick around four feet deep and eight to ten feet in diameter, which has a small brick oven at its base. The vessels are piled up over this oven in cone-shape, sometimes to a height of twelve feet. It is then covered thickly with brushwood in order that the heat may be kept in and that there may come no sudden chilling. The fire is made to burn until the pottery is hardened sufficiently. The prophet Nahum refers to the preparation for baking pottery when he says: "Make strong the brick kiln" ([Nahum 3:14](#)). Sometimes inferior products are made by insufficient burning of vessels.

The Fragility Of Pottery

Eastern pottery is indeed very brittle, especially when modern methods of glazing are unknown. Many times the young woman going for the family water supply has had to come home without it, because she put down her water pitcher too suddenly. The writer of Ecclesiastes has this in mind when he says: "The pitcher be broken at the fountain" ([Eccles. 12:6](#)). When only a slight blow will break pottery into pieces, intentional dashing of a vessel of clay to the ground will result in complete ruin, and this is the picture often used by Biblical writers of divine judgment upon God's enemies, or upon His people who disobey Him. "Thou shalt dash them in pieces like a potter's vessel" ([Psa. 2:9](#)). "He shall rule them with a rod of iron; as the vessels of a potter shall they be broken to shivers" ([Rev. 2:27](#)). "Thus saith the Lord of hosts; even so will I break this people and this city, as one breaketh a potter's vessel, that cannot be made whole again" ([Jer. 19:11](#)).

Use Of Broken Fragments Of Pottery

Broken pieces of earthen vessels are to be seen about a potter's place, and also in many other places in the East. Some of these pieces which happen to be of suitable size and shape are of practicable use for the peasants. Isaiah gives two uses for them: "And he shall break it as the breaking of the potter's vessel that is broken in pieces; he shall not spare: so that there shall not be found in the bursting of it a shard to take fire from the hearth, or to take water withal out of the pit" ([Isa. 30:14](#)). In the evening time it is a common sight to see children coming to the public ovens with shards of pottery in their hands, and go away with a small amount of hot coals or hot embers, which the baker has placed on each child's shard, in order that the homes represented might be able to warm up their evening meal. Then at the spring, well, or cistern, shards that are of the right size and shape to hold water are often left there that they might be used as ladles for filling the container, or as drinking cups. In ancient times when parchment was so expensive to possess, peasants would use fragments of pottery on which to scratch memoranda of business transactions. Many of these have been uncovered by archaeologists, and have proven to be of great value in revealing past history. They are called "ostraca."

The Carpenter

Palestine carpenters.



Carpenter Working with Primitive Bow-Drill

Picture:

Carpenter Working with Primitive Bow-Drill Oriental carpenters have plied their trade in the Holy Land in much the same way through the centuries. Visitors to towns like Nazareth or Tiberias have found these workmen to be quite primitive. About the only modern innovation they have adopted has been to have a workbench instead of sitting on the floor beside their working board, as some men, engaged in related crafts, actually do even in modern times. Instead of working, however, always at this bench, they are seen to do much of their work at the doorsill where the light is much better. This occupation has undergone little change from the days when they said of the young Messiah, "Is not this the carpenter?" ([Mark 6:3](#)).

Carpenter's Tools

With but few exceptions, the tools used by the carpenter in Bible times are those used by these primitive Palestinian carpenters of today. The prophet Isaiah names four instruments used by the carpenter of his day. "The carpenter stretcheth out his rule; he marketh it out with a line; he fitteth it with planes, and he marketh it out with the compass" ([Isa. 44:13](#)). The "rule" was no doubt a measuring line; the "line" was a *marking tool* or *stylus*, taking the place of our *pencil*; the "plane" was a scraping tool; and the "compass" was an *instrument for making a circle*, as it is today. The "ax" was used in olden times to shape timber as well as to fell trees. It had an iron head usually fastened by means of thongs to a wooden handle, and so it was easy for the head to slip off (cf. [Deut. 19:5](#) and [2Kings 6:5](#)).

Excavations at the city of Gezer revealed that the people of Palestine in Bible times had developed ribbon-flint knives into saws by making their edges irregular. Finds there also indicate that they used saws that were made of thin, flexible strips of metal that had been set in frames of wood. Isaiah mentions the use of the saw: "Shall the saw magnify itself against him that shaketh it?" ([Isa. 10:15](#)). Jeremiah refers to the use of hammers and nails: "They fasten it with nails and with hammers that it move not" ([Jer. 10:4](#)). The archaeologists have found an abundance of bronze and iron nails. The hammers they have brought to light were made mostly of stone. Thus Christ must have made use of both hammer and nails in his Nazareth carpenter shop. The Bible mentions twice the use of the awl ([Exod. 21:6](#); [Deut. 15:17](#)). These boring instruments as found at Gezer were usually set in bone handles. Chisels found there were made either of bronze or iron. Christ must have used this tool also.

Products Of The Carpenter

There are several products of the Eastern carpenter's skill. Many have wondered what Jesus as a carpenter made. There is an old tradition that has come down to us, that he was a maker of *plows and yokes*. The yoke, and most of the plow, with the exception of the iron ploughshare, are constructed of wood, and so would be the task of the carpenters. As there were many farmers among the ancient Hebrews,

as there are among the Arab peasants today, there would be a great demand for yokes and plows. Other products of the carpenter would include wooden locks and wooden keys for houses, doors, roofs, windows, low tables, chairs or stools, and chests for storage use. The carpenter's most ornamental work would include paneling of the roof, latticework for windows, and decorative art on house doors.

The Skill Of The Oriental Carpenter

Because of the use of what seems to the Westerner to be very crude and primitive tools, some have thought that these workmen are lacking in skill, but this is not so. In many ways he is able to use his simple tools in a way that displays great skill. Much personal attention is given to the product, and great pride is taken in the resulting handiwork.

Hunters

Nimrod The First Hunter Recorded By Scripture

He was called "a mighty hunter before the Lord" ([Gen. 10:9](#)). Of Ishmael it is said that he "dwelt in the wilderness, and became an archer" ([Gen. 21:20](#)). Esau was "a cunning hunter" ([Gen. 25:27](#)). Isaac said to Esau, "Take, I pray thee, thy weapons, thy quiver and thy bow, and go out to the field, and take me some venison" ([Gen. 27:3](#)). Hunting was common in Egypt, and Israel must have been acquainted with it when she dwelt there. There was also, no doubt, some hunting of the Israelites during the wilderness wanderings on the Sinai Peninsula. Upon entering Canaan, it was necessary for Israel to engage in hunting since otherwise their occupation of the land would have been made more difficult. The Lord had said to them, "I will not drive them out from before thee in one year; lest the land become desolate, and the beast of the field multiply against thee" ([Exod. 23:29](#)). The Law of Moses made provision for hunting for food. "And whatsoever man there be of the children of Israel, or of the strangers that sojourn among you, which hunteth and catcheth any beast or fowl that may be eaten; he shall even pour out the blood thereof, and cover it with dust" ([Lev. 17:13](#)).

Hunting To Protect The Sheep

Hunting has been undertaken through the years in Palestine of necessity as a means of protecting the flocks of sheep and goats. In Bible times the chief enemies of the sheep included the lion, the bear, the leopard, the wolf, and the hyena. The shepherd's activities along these lines have already been dealt with.

Animals Killed For Food

Among the wild animals, different species of the deer were sought after especially by the Jewish hunters for food. It was venison that Isaac asked Esau to bring him ([Gen. 27:3](#)). The Law refers to the roebuck (gazelle) and the hart as being desired by Israel for meat ([Deut. 12:15](#)). The dinner table of King Solomon was served with the meat of harts, roebucks, and fallowdeer ([1Kings 4:23](#)).

Fowl Killed For Meat

God's wholesale supply of quail for Israel in the wilderness is indication of the popularity of that kind of meat among ancient hunters. The Arabs today have often captured quantities of this bird, and after much of the meat is consumed, the rest of it is preserved for future use by being split and then laid out for the sun to dry it. This is just what Israel did with its excess supply of quail meat: "And they spread them all abroad for themselves round about the camp" ([Num. 11:32](#)). Doves and pigeons were also popular as food among the Israelites. Many of them were tamed, but wild ones were often sought after for food as well as for sacrificial purposes. The Bible speaks of their nesting in the clefts and holes of the rocks, "O my dove, that art in the clefts of the rock" ([Cant. 2:14](#)).

The Methods Used By Hunters

In modern times, the use of the gun is gradually doing away with ancient customs of hunting with more primitive weapons in Bible lands. But the Bible has given us a clear picture of those methods which have been practiced for years. Pitfalls for larger animals were often employed. These pits were covered over with a thin covering of rushes and brush so as to hide their presence, and sometimes approaches were constructed to the place of the pit, which made it possible to force the animal into the hole. The prophet Ezekiel tells of this method of catching a lion. "And she brought up one of her whelps: it became a young lion, and it learned to catch the prey; it devoured men. The nations also heard of him; he was taken in their pit" ([Ezek. 19:3, 4](#)).

Some animals such as the wild bull or antelope were sometimes caught by using a net. Isaiah mentions this method. "As a wild bull [antelope] in a net" ([Isa 51:20](#)). The net used by the Hebrews was probably of two varieties. The one was long and had several ropes and was supported on poles that were forked and were of different lengths according to the inequalities of the ground which the net covered. The other type of net was smaller and was utilized in order to stop gaps.

When the pitfall or net was not used, then the hunter made use of one of the following methods: the arrows, slingstones, the spear, or the dart. All of these are referred to in the Lord's message to the patriarch Job: "The arrow cannot make him flee: the slingstones are turned with him into stubble. Darts are counted as stubble: he laugheth at the shaking of a spear" ([Job 41:28-29](#)).

In catching birds, the *snares* was often used. David was evidently acquainted with bird traps, for he compared his escape from his enemies to the escape of a bird from a trap. "Our soul is escaped as a bird out of the snare of the fowlers: the snare is broken, and we are escaped" ([Psa. 124:7](#)). This bird trap was made in two parts and when set, and spread upon the ground, was fastened slightly by means of a trap stick. When the bird touched this stick, the parts flew up and enclosed the bird in the net.

Hide-outs For Wild Animals

Palestine and Syria have their hide-outs for wild animals and fowl. Wild beasts have lived in the wild parts of the Lebanon Mountains to the north of the Holy Land through the years, but this was more the source of these animals for Syria rather than for the main part of Palestine itself. The marshes immediately north of Lake Merom have through the centuries been the haunt of many waterfowl, and the reeds thereby have provided lairs for various animals, especially the wild buffalo. When Herod the Great was a young man he used to come here to hunt game. Today, the Jews are busy draining much of this swampland that it may be used for agricultural purposes. The principal hide-out for wild animals that bother the citizens of Palestine, and especially Judea and Samaria, is the *Zor* of the Jordan Valley. The Jordan Valley between the Sea of Galilee and the Dead Sea is called by the Arabs, *The Ghor*, i.e., "the Rift." Within the *Ghor* is a narrow and deep valley called *The Zor*, in the center of which the river flows. For much of this distance the *Zor* is a jungle of tropical plants, shrubs, and trees. It is thus a hideout for all kinds of wild animals. During the part of the year when the river overflows, the wild beasts are driven from their haunts, but return there when the river recedes. Most of the wild animals that have raided the habitable parts of Palestine through its history have come from these haunts in Jordan Valley. Thus Jeremiah says: "Behold, he shall come up like a lion from the

swelling of Jordan against the habitation of the strong" ([Jer. 49:19](#)). The scene of the temptation of Jesus was doubtless the Wilderness of Judea. Mark says of Jesus: "And he ... was with the wild beasts" ([Mark 1:13](#)). Quite probably most of these animals had come up from the Zor which was near at hand.

Fishermen

Places For Fishing

In Palestine the main fishing places have been along the Mediterranean coast, and in the Sea of Galilee, with some little done in the streams of water. The Israelites in the wilderness said: "We remember the fish, which we did eat in Egypt" ([Num. 11:5](#)). Most interest centers in the Galilee fishing, because of the Gospel incidents connected with the Lord Jesus and his early fishermen disciples. The Jews engaged in a large fishing business in the days of Jesus in the waters of Galilee. A few years ago A. C. Haddad, a native of Syria and a twentieth century resident of Palestine, counted sixty men, all of them Arabs, as earning their living as Peter did, by fishing in the Sea of Galilee. Their methods of work have been very similar to those used by the disciples of Jesus. Such methods will fast disappear from this region now, since the new state of Israel controls this body of water, and up-to-date Western fishing equipment is taking the place of former more primitive methods. The new government has subsidized the fishing industry on Galilee.

Angling.

Angling

It is not thought probable that the disciples in Galilee used this method of fishing very extensively. That it was used on occasions is seen from the account of Peter's catching a fish with a hook, and discovering the coin in its mouth with which he paid the temple tax ([Matt. 17:27](#)). Isaiah speaks of it in connection with fishing in the streams: "The fishers also shall mourn, and all they that cast angle into the brooks shall lament" ([Isa. 19:8](#)). Amos makes reference to this type of fishing when he says, "He will take you away with hooks, and your posterity with fishhooks" ([Amos 4:2](#)). The excavation at the mound of Gezer brought to light an actual fishhook, indicating the ancient use of the angling method of fishing.

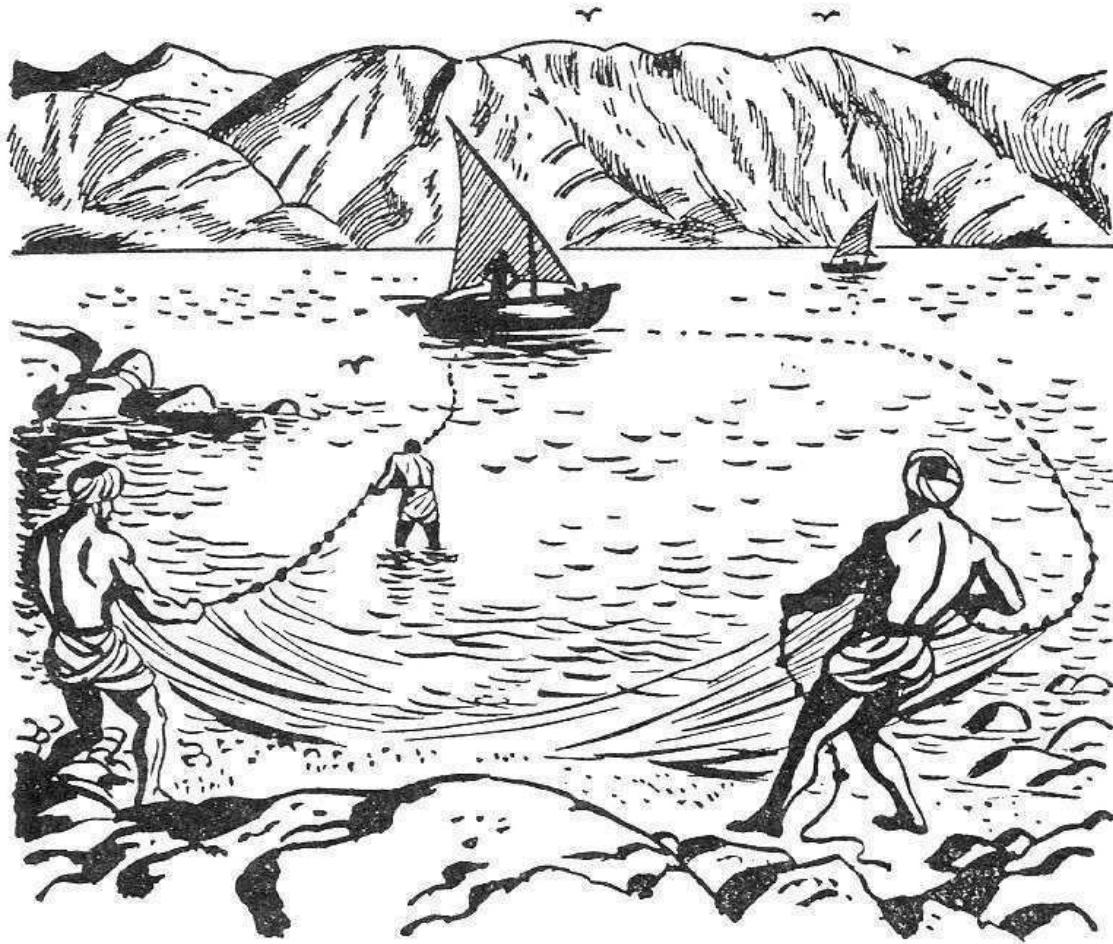
Spearng Of Fish

The book of Job refers to this method of fishing. "Canst thou fill his skin with barbed irons? or his head with fish spears?" ([Job 41:7](#)). That such method was practiced in Egypt is proven by inscriptions picturing Egyptians using fishing-spears .

The Cast Net, Or Hand Net

Two of the disciples were busy with such a net when Jesus called them to be fishers of men. "Now as he walked by the Sea of Galilee, he saw Simon and Andrew his brother casting a net into the sea: for they were fishers. And Jesus said unto them, Come ye after me, and I will make you to become fishers of men" ([Mark 1:16, 17](#)). This sort of net is in circular form about fifteen feet in diameter, with fine meshes. Around the edge it has lead sinkers. A long piece of line is attached to the center of the net. This line is held by the left hand, and the net is gathered up in the right hand, and is cast with a broad sweep of that arm over shallow water near the shore wherever a shoal of fish is observed to be. The middle of the net is then drawn by the cord, and the fisherman is able to wade into the water to get what he has caught.

The Dragnet, Or Drawnet



Galilee Fishermen

Picture:

Galilee Fishermen

Jesus used this sort of fishing as the basis for one of his parables. "Again the kingdom of heaven is like unto a net, that was cast into the sea, and gathered of every kind: which, when it was full, they drew to shore, and sat down, and gathered the good into vessels, but cast the bad away" ([Matt. 13:47, 48](#)). This net is a long one, sometimes hundreds of feet in length and about eight feet broad. Ropes are furnished the ends of the net. Corks are attached along one of the long sides of the net to keep it buoyed up, whereas the other long side has lead sinkers attached to it to make it sink. Sometimes the net is set between two boats in the sea, being stretched between them. The boats are rowed so as to enclose a circular space and when the boats meet, then the net is hauled into the boats, the circle becoming smaller. The bottom rope is pulled in faster than the top one and thus the fish are enclosed in a bag and are pulled into the boats. Sometimes the net is set and then drawn from the land. The one end is then taken as far as possible by a boat seaward. Then this boat brings that end of the net around with a sweep to the place of starting, where men use the same method of pulling in the nets and landing the fish. Again, two boats sometimes stretch the net between them at a distance from shore, and then they will sweep in to the shore, forcing the fish to come with them. There must be no rocky obstructions for this method to be successful.

This way of fishing illustrates the value of co-operative effort. A number of men will work together. Some of them will row the boats, some will have to pull the rope with great strength, and some will throw stones or in other ways seek to keep the fish from getting away by frightening them. As they get close to the shore, the edges of the net are held, and it is dragged to land and the fish must be seized. Afterward the fish caught are sorted, as indicated in the parable of Jesus. What an illustrative lesson this is in co-operative soul winning !

Fishing At Night

Galilee fishermen often have fished at night. They light their way with a blazing torch, and sighting fish they let fly their fishing spear, or fling their net into the sea. But sometimes they fish all night with no results, as was the case with Simon Peter and his comrades. "Master, we have toiled all the night, and have taken nothing" ([Luke 5:5](#)).

The Location Of Shoals

A Galilee fisherman was seen one day to use his hand net as he waded into the waters of the sea. He cast his net several times and it came up empty. But presently the man's companion on the shore shouted to him to cast to the left, and when this was done, the net was drawn up with fish in it. Shoals of fish are sometimes seen by those on the shore when they are hidden from the view of the fishermen in the water. Such was what happened with Jesus and his disciples as reported by John: "But when the morning was now come, Jesus stood on the shore: but the disciples knew not that it was Jesus. Then Jesus saith unto them, Children, have ye any meat? They answered him, No. And he said unto them, Cast the net on the right side of the ship, and ye shall find. They cast therefore, and now they were not able to draw

it for the multitude of fishes" ([John 21:4-6](#)). This ability to see from the shore what the fishermen in a boat fail to see, does not do away with a miracle taking place with the disciples. It was the power of Jesus that brought the great number of fish to the particular spot where the disciples could catch them in their nets.

Masons

Expert masons have always been in demand in Bible lands through the years. The building of house walls and terrace walls usually called for stone or brick. This trade is of interest to the student of Scripture because of the numerous illustrative references to it in the Bible.

Foundations And Cornerstones

In building foundations it is important to get down to rock or otherwise the shrinkage and expansion due to the summer heat and the winter rains will do damage to the construction. Jesus tells of a good mason who "digged deep, and laid the foundation on a rock" ([Luke 6:48](#)). Deep trenches are dug, and filled with stone and lime, and this is allowed to settle all it will. All this being below the surface of the ground is invisible afterwards, and therefore it is considered a lack of courtesy for one man to build upon another man's foundation, as Paul mentions ([Rom. 15:20](#)). The cornerstone is another important part of the mason's work of which Scripture speaks. When the first layer of oblong stones is laid on the foundation, a broad square stone is selected for each corner where two walls meet. A thinner square block is usually put at each corner of the top rows of stones where the roof-beams are to rest. When trimming the oblong stones forming the bulk of the walls, it is easy for the mason to pass by the stone suitable for the cornerstone because of its uninviting shape. Thus the Psalmist said: "The stone which the builders refused is become the head stone of the corner" ([Psa. 118:22](#)).

The Mason's Equipment

The plumbline is composed of a small inverted lead cone which is fastened by a cord to a cylindrical piece of wood made of the same diameter. The mason puts the wood to the newly set stone, and the suspended lead should barely touch the wall. To be a permanent one, every wall must stand the test of the plumbline. The prophet Amos compared the Lord's test of Israel to the mason's use of a plumbline. "Behold, I will set a plumbline in the midst of my people Israel" ([Amos 7:8](#)). The prophet Ezekiel describes a man making use of a measuring reed ([Ezek. 40:3](#)). This was used by a mason in laying the foundation and in the construction of the walls. It is a straight cane around twenty feet long, and is used to measure wall spaces, especially between windows and doors. Sometimes a shorter reed is also used. The prophets said of the Lord, I will stretch over Jerusalem the line of Samaria" ([2Kings 21:13](#)). Evidently this was a leveling line which was strung from stones at each end of the wall being built. It was used in conjunction with the plumbline.

Metal Workers

A study of working with metal would need to begin with "Tubal-cain, the forger of every cutting instrument of brass [copper] and iron" ([Gen. 4:22](#), A. R. V.). The Orientals who lived three to four thousand years ago were very advanced in the mechanical arts. Some of the work of those skilled ancient workmen, as brought to light by archaeologists, is superior to anything the world has produced since.

Blacksmiths

In the days of King Saul the Philistines put a ban on Hebrew blacksmiths. "Now there was no Smith found throughout all the land of Israel: for the Philistines said, Lest the Hebrews make them swords or spears" ([1Sam. 13:19](#)). The Philistines required the Hebrews to bring their coulters and mattocks to the vicinity of Ramle to be sharpened, and this district in the Valley of Ajalon for many years afterward came to be known as the Valley of Smiths. But Jewish blacksmiths were active in the days of Isaiah, for he said: "The Smith with the tongs both worketh in the coals, and fashioneth it with hammers" ([Isa. 44:12](#)). Isaiah refers to the blacksmith's anvil ([Isa. 41:7](#)), and Jeremiah makes mention of his bellows ([Jer. 6:29](#)). The primitive type of anvil that has been in use for centuries is simply a cube of iron that has been inserted in a block of oak log. The old type of bellows, which is worked by hand, is made of the skin either of a goat or of a cow with the hair left on it.

Coppersmiths

Moses described the land of Canaan as being "a land whose stones are iron, and out of whose hills thou mayest dig brass [copper]" ([Deut. 8:9](#)). Deposits of copper and iron have been discovered along the length of Wadi Araba which leads to the Gulf of Akaba. An excavation at Tel el Kheleifeh, which is the site of ancient Ezion-geber, King Solomon's port city, has revealed that some of Solomon's copper and iron refineries were located there. The builders of the smelters at Ezion-geber faced their furnaces toward the prevailing wind which was northwest. Winds that continued steadily blew through flue holes and kept the fire in the furnace rooms burning. Thus in those days the same principle essentially was employed as that of the Bessemer blast furnace of modern times. Solomon must have carried on a thriving business in copper. Scripture says: "And the pots, and the shovels, and the basons: and all these vessels, which Hiram made to King Solomon for the house of the Lord, were of bright brass [i.e., burnished copper]" ([1Kings 7:45](#)).

Silversmiths And Goldsmiths

Nehemiah mentions the presence of goldsmiths ([Neh. 3:8](#)), and the most famous example of a silversmith is Demetrius, whose business was interfered with by the evangelistic work of the Apostle Paul ([Acts 19:24](#)). The Apostle Peter used the goldsmith's task as an illustration of the trial of the Christian's faith. "That the trial of your faith, being much more precious than of gold that perisheth . . . might be found unto praise and honor" ([1Pet. 1:7](#)). The apostle is describing an old-time goldsmith who places his crude ore in a crucible and then applies the heat to melt it. When the impurities come to the surface they are skimmed off. When the workman is able to see his face reflected clearly in the surface of the molten liquid, he takes it away from the fire, and knows that he has pure gold left.

Tanners And Dyers

The Tanning Business

This has always been an important business in Bible lands. Peter stayed at the house of Simon the tanner when he was at Joppa ([Acts 9:43](#)). In recent years the important tanneries have been located at Hebron and at Jaffa. Sheepskins are sometimes used for making shoe leather, although goatskin leather is generally considered to be superior to that made from sheepskins. Goatskins are used largely for the making of bottles for carrying water or other liquids. Except for the neck, legs, and tail, the goatskins are stripped off whole. The holes where the legs and tail were located are sewn up, and the end where the neck was, becomes the mouth of the bottle. These goatskins when laid out in rows for the sun to cure them, look much like pigs with head and legs missing. Sheepskins are treated in a similar way and made soft, and then they are dyed a yellow or red color when used in the making of shoes.

Oriental Dyeing

The Orientals have some very fine dyes. Their favorite color is a brilliant crimson, and the dye they use to make this color comes from

a worm or grub that feeds on oak and other plants. Indigo is made from the rind of pomegranate. Purple is made from the murex shellfish which can still be found on the beach at the city of Acre. Luke tells of Lydia, "a seller of purple, of the city of Thyatira" ([Acts 16:14](#)). She was a merchant who sold the purple dye to tanners, weavers, and others. This business of dyeing with which she was connected, had long been centered in the city of Thyatira. Inscriptions have been discovered that refer to "a guild of dyers" that was located in that vicinity.

Tentmakers

Because of the large use of tents by the Hebrew people, there has been a great demand for tentmakers. Besides the ordinary tent used as a dwelling, many portable tents were made for the use of travelers. In New Testament times it was the custom to teach every Jewish boy some trade. As Jesus was a carpenter, so Paul was a tentmaker. Paul practiced this trade in company with Aquila at Corinth ([Acts 18:1-3](#)). Rough goat's hair was used in making these tents, and Paul had learned to cut the cloth straight, even as he did the "straight interpretation of God's word" (Cf. [2Tim. 2:15](#)). Dr. Edersheim says: "In Alexandria the different trades sat in the synagogue arranged into guilds, and St. Paul could have no difficulty in meeting in the bazaar of his trade with the like-minded Aquila and Priscilla with whom to find a lodging."

Merchants

The Merchant's Place Of Business



Oriental Market Place

Picture:

Oriental Market Place

In the Oriental city or village, the market place is an important place for the doing of business. It is not always located in the same place. It may be near the city gates, or it may be in the open streets of the town. The market is not always in operation in some districts, but is open for business whenever there is something to be sold. The arrival in town of a camel caravan would be one great occasion for setting up the market place and the selling of produce, especially the "blessed grain." Also, many goods are sold in the oriental bazaar. This is usually a covered arcade containing a row of narrow shops on each side, and those of like trade often having their shops together, such as those selling dry goods, grocery items, tin utensils, leather goods, sweetmeats, etc. Jeremiah speaks of the bakers' street ([Jer. 37:21](#)).

Oriental Buying And Selling

This is quite different from purchasing in the West. No fixed price is put upon whatever is to be sold. Ordinarily the buyer must expect to spend from a few minutes to an hour or so to complete a purchase. The merchant begins by asking a high price and the buyer by offering a low price. Then the bargaining continues in earnest. To a stranger this process of "striking a bargain" is a tedious one indeed, but the true

Orientals enjoy it greatly. Among them, haggling over prices, and controversy, argument, and excitement usually become heated." When the sale is made, the buyer will go away to boast of his splendid bargain, and will be greatly admired by the seller. The Book of Proverbs pictures such a purchaser: "It is bad, it is bad, saith the buyer; but when he is gone his way, then he boasteth" ([Prov. 20:14](#), A. R. V.).

Payment For Goods

Payment is not always in cash or coins for goods purchased. Barter and trade originally took the place of money. There was exchange of goods in kind. In early Old Testament times the giving of money took the form of weighing precious metals to be given the seller. Thus "Abraham weighed to Ephron the silver, which he had named in the audience of the sons of Heth" ([Gen. 23:16](#)). This was the purchase price for the Cave of Machpelah. Concerning the money in the sacks of Joseph's brethren, Scripture says: "Every man's money was in the mouth of his sack, our money in full weight" ([Gen. 43:21](#)). The first coins did not appear until about 700 B. C. The New Testament refers to the coinage of the Roman Empire which was in general use in those days for business transactions. But the Oriental seller does not always receive cash. Debt is common among many. Sometimes a poor peasant will sow seed he has borrowed, on borrowed land, using borrowed tools, and will even live in a borrowed house. The parable Jesus told of the unjust steward refers to men who owed their lord various amounts such as "an hundred measures of oil," and "an hundred measures of wheat" ([Luke 16:5-7](#)).

Oriental Method Of Measuring Grain



Measuring Grain

Picture:

Measuring Grain

In selling grain in Bible lands it is the custom that each measure must run over. Likewise such liquids as oil or milk should run over a small amount into the buyers vessel. A bushel measure is used for measuring the grain. As this measure begins to be full to the brim, the grain is pressed down, and then two or three shakes are given from side to side to settle the grain. The man who is doing the measuring then puts more grain on top, and repeats the shaking process until the measure is actually full clear to the brim. He then presses gently on the grain and makes a small hollow place on top and taking additional handfuls of grain he makes a cone on the surface. He builds up the cone until it can hold no more, some of it beginning to run over. Following this the grain is emptied into the buyer's container. Such is Oriental measure. Jesus said, "Give, and it shall be given you; good measure, pressed down, and shaken together, running, over, shall they give into your bosom [lap]. For with what measure ye mete it shall be measured to you again" ([Luke 6:38](#), cf. A. R. V.). The word translated "bosom" should be "lap," because it is not in his bosom but in the skirt of his garment that there is ample room, and there the Oriental carries his grain, like a woman among us might carry things in her folded apron.

Money-changers And Bankers

Money-changers

Although the modern section of Jerusalem has had its Western type of banks with capital running into the millions of dollars, the old section of the city has always had its money-changers. These men change people's money from one type of currency to another, and also provide change within the same currency. The money-changer sits beside the narrow street and behind a little glass-top table, under which his coins are on display. A charge of about ten per cent is made for the transaction. This profession has been necessary because of the great variety of coinage in Palestine and Syria, and also because of so many tourists from all over the world.

In the days of Jesus, the money-changers sat in the spacious Court of the Gentiles, or in one of the adjoining porches of the Jerusalem temple, and carried on their business there. When the Jewish nation was numbered, it was required by the law of Moses that every male Israelite who was twenty years or older, pay into the temple treasury a half-shekkel as an offering to the Lord ([Exod. 30:13-15](#)). This had to be paid by using the exact Hebrew half-shekkel, and the moneychanger provided the right coins for the multitudes that came to Jerusalem for the feasts. The Jewish Talmud says that the rate of twelve per cent was charged by the changers for each transaction. In addition to the

need for the half-shekel tribute money, the money-changers would provide the exact coins necessary to purchase the animals or doves required for the sacrifices for the temple. It has been estimated that these changers would reap a profit of from forty to forty-five thousand dollars. The business of money-changing was considered to be a legitimate business, although there were unscrupulous practices connected with it, but Jesus condemned these men largely because of bringing their business into the temple courts where men should have come in the spirit of true prayer and worship.

Bankers.

Bankers

Borrowing money at a rate of interest has been practiced in Palestine in modern times among the natives. Two references from Jesus indicate it was done in his day: "Thou oughtest therefore to have put my money to the exchangers, and then at my coming I should have received mine own with usury [interest]" ([Matt. 25:27](#)). "Wherefore then gavest not thou my money into the bank, that at my coming I might have required mine own with usury [interest] ([Luke 19:23](#)).

The Greek word for bank means "table" or "bench" across which the money was paid out or received. The Phoenicians invented the money-lending system, and it was in full operation in the various provinces of the Roman Empire in Christ's time. The law of Moses did not allow the Israelites to lend to one another upon interest ([Deut. 23:19](#), etc.). But it did allow them to charge interest upon loans made to Gentiles ([Deut. 23:20](#)). Jesus did not here condemn the charging of interest by a bank, for the word translated "usury" should be translated "interest."

Taxgatherers

Taxcollection Under The Turkish Government

In the days when the Turkish government controlled Palestine, a system of farming out import and export duties, excise taxes, and government produce tithes, was in force. A company would guarantee the government a certain sum for a tax, and then, having the monopoly of this, would charge the public enough to make sure a good profit for the deal. Much oppression and injustice was fostered by such a system, but it was continued so long that the public finally accepted it as a necessary evil. *Taxcollection under the Roman Empire*. A somewhat similar system to the Turkish system was in operation in the Roman Empire in New Testament times. The office of *publican, or taxcollector*, was in itself legitimate enough, as it was necessary to have government taxes, and important to collect them. But there was resentment on the part of the Jews against paying taxes to a Gentile government. This resentment was increased all the more because among these taxcollectors there was much graft and oppression, as charged by John the Baptist: "Then came also publicans to be baptized, and said unto him, Master, what shall we do? And he said unto them, Exact no more than that which is appointed you" ([Luke 3:12, 13](#)). Because of this situation, the publicans came to be associated by the Jews with notorious sinners. Such expressions as "the publicans and the harlots," and "publicans and sinners" were in common use among them ([Matt. 9:11](#); [Matt. 21:31](#)). Because Jesus sought to be friendly with, and bring help to, the lowest of men, certain men of His day gave Him the title, "friend of publicans and sinners" ([Matt. 11:19](#)).

Matthew was a publican who had his customs office not far from Capernaum on the road from Damascus to Acre, where he could examine the goods of travelers along this highway, and could collect the required taxes. Holding this office he had of necessity to violate the Pharisaical Sabbath observances, and would therefore cause wrath to be upon him. But Jesus called Matthew to follow Him. "And saw a publican, named Levi, sitting at the receipt of custom: and he said unto him, Follow me" ([Luke 5:27](#)). Zaccheus was not an ordinary taxcollector, but rather a taxcommissioner, who farmed out a whole district, and had other taxcollectors under his jurisdiction. His conversion was so thorough that he agreed, "If I have taken anything from any man by false accusation, I restore him fourfold" ([Luke 19:4](#)).

Physicians

Physicians Among Orientals Today

Orientals have two names for their men who practice the art of healing. They call him "the wise man," and also term him, "the holy man." The first title indicates the skill they think necessary in him, and the second shows their belief that a holy man has power from God to heal. Often one after another doctors are summoned, which reminds one of the poor woman who "had suffered many things of many physicians" ([Mark 5:26](#)), before she was healed by Jesus. The most common ailments from which the people of the East suffer include: eye infections, skin diseases, consumption, and malarial and typhoidal fevers. The Orientals have a proverb which emphasizes the importance they attach to faith: "Have faith, though it be only in a stone, and you will recover." They have a strong conviction that, although they believe it a duty to use what means are available, the real power to heal is Divine.

Physicians In Old Testament Times

Physicians were present from early Bible times. The Code of Hammurabi, under which Abraham grew up as a young man in Babylonia, specified that if a surgeon should operate on a man's eye, using a copper lancet, and the man should lose his eye because of the operation, then the doctor's eye should be put out with a copper lancet. Job talks of "physicians of no value" ([Job 13:4](#)) when referring to his friends who were trying to comfort him. The law of Moses contained an ordinance providing that a man wounded in a brawl should have his loss of time paid for by the one responsible for his wounds, and adds, "and shall cause him to be thoroughly healed" ([Exod. 21:19](#)). Circumcision was an operation in surgery. The Sacred Writer indicates that King Asa put his confidence in physicians instead of the Lord when he reports: "And Asa in the thirty and ninth year of his reign was diseased in his feet, until his disease was exceeding great: yet in his disease he sought not to the Lord, but to the physicians. And Asa slept with his fathers" ([2Chron. 16:12, 13](#)).

Physicians In New Testament Times

In New Testament times there were many physicians. Among them were, no doubt, many who were not worthy of the name. Concerning the poor woman who had been to many doctors, Mark adds, "and was nothing bettered, but rather grew worse" ([Mark 5:26](#)), indicating that these physicians had harmed her rather than helped her. But there were sincere practicing physicians, and Luke was a notable example. In his Epistle to the Colossians, Paul called him: "Luke, the beloved physician" ([Col. 4:14](#)). In the ruins of the city of Pompeii, there "was found a number of instruments exactly such as our best surgeons now use." The Bible recognizes the presence of physicians, but does not give a prominent place to them. God's power to heal sickness is emphasized in both the Old and New Testaments. See also [Sickness In Bible Lands](#).

CHAPTER 23

VOCAL AND INSTRUMENTAL MUSIC

Origin Of Musical Instruments

JUBAL, THE PIONEER MUSICIAN. Concerning him Scripture says: "He was the father of all such as handle the harp and pipe" ([Gen. 4:21](#), A. R. V.). Doubtless this means he was the inventor of these musical instruments, and as he was not many generations removed from Adam, we may infer that music has always played an important role in the history of mankind.

Babylonian Musical Instruments Preceding Abraham

Since Abraham spent his early life in Ur of the Chaldees, it is more than likely that some of the musical instruments used by the patriarchs had their origin in that land. Woolley's excavations at Ur brought to light from one of the death pits in connection with a royal tomb, four harps or lyres, one of which was a magnificent specimen. The artistic beauty of these gold and mosaic musical instruments emphasizes the fact that the musical art was at a high level in those ancient days. cylinder-seal of a queen of the land of Abraham's birth, who reigned about a thousand years before his time, reveals the fact that timbrels were being used at banquets and at religious gatherings. Jacob's father-in-law Laban, lived in Babylonian territory, and when Jacob left him in haste, he said to him: "Wherefore didst thou flee away secretly . . . that I might have sent thee away with mirth, and with songs, with tabret, and with harp?" ([Gen. 31:27](#)). This suggests the possibility that some of these musical instruments as used in Babylonia found their way into the life of the early Hebrews.

Egyptian Musical Instruments Influencing Moses And Israel

Moses received a thorough education at the hands of the Egyptians, and music was an important part of his training. Music was greatly emphasized in Egyptian religious services. The following instruments were used by them: the harp, the lyre, the flute, the tambourine, and cymbals. Dancing was commonly connected with the use of musical instruments. Some phases of Egyptian musical customs most probably followed the Israelites from Egypt into the land of Canaan.

Musical Celebration Of Red Sea Victory

After the miraculous crossing of Israel through the Red Sea, the victory over the Egyptians was fittingly celebrated with music. "And Miriam the prophetess, the sister of Aaron, took a timbrel in her hand; and all the women went out after her with timbrels and with dances" ([Exod. 15:20](#)). There was the singing of a song, the words of which Moses gives us. This was accompanied by the use of the timbrel, and alone with it was dancing. This timbrel was a circular hoop, made of either wood or brass, and covered with skin tightly drawn, and with small bells hung around it.

Israel's Use Of Trumpets

The trumpets as used by the Hebrews were in three forms. The earliest form was made from the horn of an ox or a ram. A second form was a curved metallic trumpet. And a later form was the straight trumpet, a representation of which is seen on the Arch of Titus. Moses was commanded of the Lord to make two silver trumpets which were to be sounded forth "for the calling of the assembly, and for the journeying of the camps" ([Num. 10:2](#)). Also God told them: "If ye go to war in your land against the enemy that oppresseth you, then ye shall blow an alarm with the trumpets" ([Num. 10:9](#)). The fiftieth year, or the Year of Jubilee, was ushered in on the Day of Atonement by the blowing of the trumpets ([Lev. 25:8, 9](#)). Throughout the history of Israel, trumpets were used to gather the people together in times of war that they might go to battle, and usually in times of peace that they might come to the sanctuary for the purpose of divine worship.

Special Occasions For The Use Of Music

Among the Hebrews, vocal and instrumental music together with dancing were employed on

most occasions of great joy. Victories in battle were thus celebrated. In this way the women of Israel celebrated the victory of young David and the army of Saul over the Philistines. "And it came to pass as they came, when David returned from the slaughter of the Philistines, that the women came out of all the cities of Israel, singing and dancing, to meet King Saul, with timbrels, with joy, and with instruments of music" ([1Sam. 18:6](#), A. R. V.). At the coronation of the boy King Joash, music was prominent. "And all the people of the land rejoiced, and blew trumpets, the singers also played on instruments of music, and led the singing of praise" ([2Chron. 23:13](#), A. R. V.). Music was also part of the entertainment at banquets. "And the harp, and the viol, the tabret, and pipe, and wine, are in their feasts." Thus wrote Isaiah about the feasts of his day ([Isa. 5:12](#)).

The Prophets' Use Of Musical Instruments

Beginning with Samuel, the prophets of Israel made much use of music and musical instruments in connection with their prophesying. Samuel told Saul, "Thou shalt meet a company of prophets coming down from the high place with a psaltery, and a tabret, and a pipe, and a harp, before them; and they shall prophesy" ([1Sam. 10:5](#)). Music helped to create the right atmosphere for spiritual exercises of devotion. Concerning Elisha the prophet it was said: "But now bring me a minstrel. And it came to pass, when the minstrel played, that the hand of the Lord came upon him" ([2Kings 3:15](#)).

The Contribution Of David To The Music Of Israel

David The Boy Musician

Through the centuries Palestine shepherd boys have played their simple dual-piped flutes made of reed, in the presence of their flocks. The strains of the music are minor, but it appeals to both the shepherd and the sheep. No doubt David's musical experience began with this instrument, when he cared for the family flock. But in addition to playing on this shepherd's instrument, young David became famed for his ability to use what our Bible versions have called "a harp." Now the instrument was not large enough to be like what Westerners today would call a harp. It would be more appropriate to call it "a lyre." Such an instrument is actually a modified form of harp, being portable. The sound-chest forms the base of it. "From the end of this arise two rods curved or straight connected above by a crosspiece, and the strings are stretched upward from the base to the crosspiece." When Saul's servants were asked to look for someone who could play on this instrument with ability, one of their number said: "I have seen a son of Jesse the Bethlehemite, that is cunning in playing" ([1Sam. 16:18](#)). And thus David came to play for King Saul when he had one of his fits of sadness, in order to refresh him.

David The Writer And Collector Of Psalms

David not only played on instruments, he also under all kinds of situations, penned beautiful psalms that helped to make up the Hebrew hymn book, we call the Book of Psalms. He drew upon his boyhood experiences to write his immortal Shepherd Psalm ([Psa. 23](#)). He wrote of his experiences when he fled from the hand of King Saul and hid in a cave ([Psa. 57](#)). And he celebrated the deliverance which the Lord gave him over all his enemies by writing [Psalm 18](#). When he repented of his great sin, he gave to the world his Penitential Psalm ([Psa. 51](#)). Thus in writing down under the Spirit's inspiration his personal experiences, men and women through the centuries have been spiritually blessed. But it must be remembered that these Psalms of David (and of other Hebrews) were originally *songs of Israel*. No doubt many of the Psalms not written by David were collected by him and inserted in the king's musical selection of poems for use in divine worship.

David The Originator Of Certain Musical Instruments

The chronicler of the Hebrew kings says of David, "Four thousand praised the Lord with the instruments which I made, said David, to praise therewith" ([1Chron. 23:5](#)). And again, "And the Levites stood with the instruments of David" ([2Chron. 29:26](#)). Either King David was himself the inventor of these instruments for worship, or at least he was responsible for their invention, for they were called his instruments.

David The Organizer Of Hebrew Musical Worship

It would appear that the Hebrew liturgy for many years following David's life was what was originally prescribed by him. The musical service rendered by the Levites in the worship of the sanctuary was organized by David. He was responsible for appointing certain ones to this task. "And with them Heman and Jeduthun with trumpets and cymbals for those that should make a sound, and with musical instruments of God" ([1Chron. 16:42](#)). We are told that Heman had fourteen sons and three daughters. And "all these were under the hands of their father for song in the house of the Lord, with cymbals, psalteries, and harps, for the service of the house of God, according to the king's order to Asaph, Jeduthun, and Heman. So the number of them, with their brethren that were instructed in the songs of the Lord, even all that were cunning, was two hundred fourscore and eight" ([1Chron. 25:6, 7](#)). No doubt these singers and players sang psalms accompanied by instruments. When King David became organizer and director of Hebrew sacred music, it may be said that he made his nation famous for its music for years to come

Character Of Some Old Testament Musical Instruments

It has already been indicated that the Old Testament word "harp" is better rendered "lyre." The word "organ" is translated by the Revisers "pipe," and is more like our *flute* than any other instrument. The "psaltery" and "viol" are stringed instruments, there being much uncertainty concerning their exact nature. "The cymbal consisted of two large and broad plates of brass, of a convex form; which being struck against each other, made a hollow ringing sound. They form in our days, a part of every military band. The "dulcimer" ([Dan. 3:5](#)) is rendered in the margin (A. R. V.), "bagpipe."

Some Songs Of The Hebrew Bible

In addition to the Book of Psalms, there are numerous Hebrew poems that were originally sung as songs and are now a part of the Hebrew Bible. Some editions of the Scriptures print these in poetic form. The Song sung by Moses and Miriam at the Red Sea is one such a song ([Exod. 15](#)). When God gave Israel water in the wilderness, they sang the Song of the Well ([Num. 21:17, 18](#)). And Moses put his final warnings and instructions to Israel into a song which he taught them ([Deut. 32](#)). The Song of Deborah ([Judges 5](#)) was sung in order to celebrate a victory over the Canaanites. The Song of Hannah ([1Sam. 2](#)) was sung as a mother's thanksgiving for the birth of her son Samuel. And the Song of Solomon was a song celebrating the love between the Lord and Israel His bride. Other songs might be added to this list.

Absence Of Music In The Captivity

In predicting the judgment of the captivity days for Israel because of her sins, the prophet said: "The mirth of tabrets ceaseth, the noise of them that rejoice endeth, the joy of the harp ceaseth" ([Isa. 24:8](#)). Music largely ceased among the captive Hebrews in Babylonia. The exiles composed a psalm in which they said:

By the rivers of Babylon, there we sat down, yea, we wept, when we remembered Zion. We hanged our harps (lyres) upon the willows in the midst thereof. For there they that carried us away captive required of us a song; and they that wasted us required of us mirth, saying, Sing us one of the songs of Zion. How shall we sing the Lord's song in a strange land? If I forget thee, O Jerusalem, let my right hand forget her cunning ([Psa. 137:1-5](#)).

The Babylonian captors had heard of the songs of Zion for which Jerusalem was noted, and asked their captives to sing one of them for them. But the Jewish religious singing was so vitally connected with the temple of Jerusalem that they refused to sing such a song in a foreign land.

References To Music In The Life Of Jesus

There are four references to music in the ministry of Jesus. The first of these has to do with

music used in mourning the death of a loved one. When Jesus came into the home where the ruler's daughter had died, Matthew says: "He saw the flute-players" ([Matt. 9:23](#), A. R. V.). In the Orient even today, professional mourners are called in to express sorrow for the loss of the deceased one. And if the family can afford to do so, as would be true of the ruler, flute-players are also brought in to express mourning through these instruments.

A second reference is when Jesus spoke of the children playing in the market place. "We played the wedding march for you, but you did not dance. We sang the funeral dirge, but you did not mourn" ([Luke 7:32](#), Williams). There are two groups of children represented here. One of them has a pipe, perhaps a shepherd's flute, and plays upon it as is done at a wedding procession all the way to the feast, saying: "Let's play wedding." But the other group refuses to join in the play. Then the one group begins to sing and wail as is done in a funeral procession, suggesting, "Let's play funeral," but the other group continues obstinately to refuse to co-operate.

A third reference to music is in Christ's famous story of the Prodigal Son. When the wayward boy returned home, his father celebrated with a banquet. And when the elder brother came in from the field it is said "he heard music and dancing" ([Luke 15:25](#)). It was customary at banquets to have singers and players on instruments, especially flute-players, along with dancers.

The fourth reference is what happened at the end of the Last Supper. The record reads: "And when they had sung an hymn, they went out into the Mount of Olives" ([Mark 14:26](#)). Unquestionably what Jesus and his disciples sang was from the Psalms. It was the custom of the Jews to sing at the close of the Passover meal [Psalms 115](#) to 118. The manner of singing was what we would call chanting, and the music itself was in the minor key. Orthodox Jews today observe similar customs.

New Testament Songs And Music

The New Testament contains a number of songs, not all of which are ordinarily considered to be songs. There is the Magnificat, or Song of Mary, sung in anticipation of the birth of Jesus ([Luke 1:46-55](#)); and the Benedictus, or Song of Zacharias, sung after the birth of John the Baptist ([Luke 1:67-79](#)); and the Song of the Angels, sung to the Bethlehem shepherds upon the birth of Jesus ([Luke 2:14](#)); the Apostle Paul's Hymn of Redemption ([Eph. 1:3-14](#)) ; and a Hymn of the Early Church ([1Tim. 3:16](#)). John's book of Revelation contains several references to songs and music. "A new song" is sung in Heaven in chapter 5:9,10 ([Rev. 5:9, 10](#)). "The Song of Moses" and "The Song of the Lamb" are sung in chapter 15:3,4 ([Rev. 15:3, 4](#)). Babylon's fall is described graphically, and concerning it John said: "And the voice of harpers, and musicians, and of pipers, and trumpeters, shall be heard no more at all in thee" ([Rev. 18:22](#)).

In his vision of Heaven John "heard the voice of harpers harping with their harps," and a song was sung before God's throne ([Rev. 14:2, 3](#)). The word for "harp" used here is not the equivalent of the Old Testament word, more correctly rendered "lyre," which was a portable harp. Rather it is indeed a harp, the music of which is sweeter than that of earth's most beautiful instruments.

CHAPTER 24

THE ORIENTAL TOWN OR CITY

Walls

DIFFERENCE BETWEEN CITY AND VILLAGE, AS TO WALLS. In early Old Testament times the *villages* were smaller places of abode without walls around them, whereas the *cities or towns* were larger places that had walls around them. The Mosaic Law made such a distinction: "If a man sell a dwelling house in a walled city" ([Lev. 25:29](#)). "But the houses of the villages which have no wall round about them" ([Lev. 25:31](#)). The villages were often located near a fortified city upon which they were more or less dependent. Thus the city was the metropolis of the villages. We often read in the Bible of "cities and their villages," and sometimes a literal translation would give us the expression: cities and their daughters," indicating a mother-city, and her dependent villages surrounding her (cf. [Joshua 15:45](#); [Joshua 17:11](#), A. R. V. margin).

Walls A Part Of City Fortifications

In Bible times most cities were walled and fortified for protection against an enemy. Those living in a city without walls would be interested in having walls built for them. Often when the Bible says that a certain character built a city, what is meant is not that a new site was located and a new city was built, but rather that a city already inhabited was supplied with walls entirely around its confines. It was thus that Solomon built "Beth horon the upper, and Beth-horon the nether, fenced cities, with walls, gates, and bars" ([2Chron. 8:5](#)).

Gates

Character Of Gates



City Gates

Picture:

City Gates

The gates of an Oriental city were of course connected with the walls; nevertheless, they were in a sense a structure by

themselves. They were usually made of wood or stone, or wood that had been armored with metal. The Psalmist speaks of gates of brass (copper), and gates of iron ([Psa. 107:16](#)). Often they were two-leaved ([Isa. 45:1](#)), and were provided with heavy locks and bars ([1Sam. 23:7](#)). Sometimes a city or town had two walls and therefore two gates with a space between them. A sentinel was stationed in the tower of the first gate. When David was at Mahanaim awaiting, the result of the battle with Absalom, Scripture says: "And David sat between the two gates: and the watchman went up to the roof over the gate unto the wall, and lifted up his eyes, and looked, and behold a man running alone" ([2Sam. 18:24](#)). This space between the gates was used for many purposes.

Gateway As A Meeting-place

The gateways of ancient walled cities and the open spaces near them, were popular meeting places for the people. They seemed like large halls that could care for great assemblies of people. Being vaulted, they provided a cool place to meet on a hot day.

Variety Of Uses For Gates

These city gates had many uses. "The openings of the gates" are described by Proverbs as "the chief place of concourse" ([Prov. 1:21](#)). The city gate was used as a public gathering place for the giving of an address or proclamation. Concerning King Hezekiah it was said: "And he set captains of war over the people, and gathered them together to him in the street of the gate of the city, and spake comfortably to them" ([2Chron. 32:6](#)). David speaks of his persecutors gossiping about him at the city gates ([Psa. 69:12](#)). Mordecai sat in the king's gate in order to attract attention from the sovereign ([Esther 2:21](#)). The prophets often preached their sermons in the gates of the city. Thus the Lord told Jeremiah, "Go and stand in the gate of the children of the people, whereby the kings of Judah come in, and by the which they go out, and in all the gates of Jerusalem" ([Jer. 17:19](#)).

City Gates A Place For Holding Court

One of the most important uses of the gates of an ancient city was for holding court. Stone seats were provided for the judges. Thus Lot sat in the gate as a judge ([Gen. 19:1](#)). The city gates of those days would be like our modern courthouse. It was there that Boaz went to redeem the estate of Elimelech and thus receive Ruth to be his wife ([Ruth 4:1](#)). The prophet Amos preached to Israel to "establish judgment in the gate" ([Amos 5:15](#)). The Mosaic law recognized the city gates as the place of justice: "Judges and officers shalt thou make thee in all thy gates, which the Lord thy God giveth thee, throughout thy tribes, and they shall judge the people with just judgment" ([Deut. 16:18](#)). Thus it can be seen that one of the most important places in an ancient city was the gates of that city.

Symbolic References To The City Gates

The Bible often refers to the gates of the city in a symbolic way. Sometimes the gates are used to represent the city as a whole, as when the Lord said to Abraham, "Thy seed shall possess the gate of his enemies" ([Gen. 22:17](#)). The Psalmist was no doubt thinking of the temple gates when he said: "Open to me the gates of righteousness" ([Psa. 118:19](#)). It is customary for the city gates to be closed at sunset, and John alludes to this by way of contrast in his description of the New Jerusalem ([Rev. 21:25](#)).

Towers

The Oriental city has had two types of towers located in it. *First* was the tower constructed as a part of the city wall. At this point the wall was built higher and served as a fortification. The approach of an enemy could be sighted from here, and weapons hurled down upon men who attempted to take the city. Almost every gate of any consequence would have a tower over it. Then towers were often built where the wall turned a corner. These were called "corner towers." King Uzziah made use of such towers: "And he made in Jerusalem engines, invented by skillful men, to be on the towers and upon the battlements [A. R. V. margin: "corner towers"] to shoot arrows and great stones withal" ([2Chron. 26:15](#)). *Second* was a citadel tower or fortress which was built apart from the wall and on higher ground than the rest of the city, and thus served to defend the city. The tower of Shechem referred to in the story of Abimelech was doubtless this sort of tower ([Judges 9:46](#)).

Streets

The words used in the Hebrew Bible for streets would indicate that there were three varieties of them. The usual street was long, narrow, and winding ([Josh. 2:19](#) etc.). Those near the city gates or those in front of a public building, or where one crossed another were broad squares ([Neh. 8:1](#)). A third kind was the short street more like our alley ([Prov. 7:8](#)). As a rule, Eastern streets today are narrow, and everything would indicate that they were narrow in ancient times. In the cities some of them are paved (usually with stone), but in the villages they are seldom paved. David said, "I did cast them out as the dirt in the streets" ([Psa. 18:42](#)). Isaiah refers to the

"mire of the streets" ([Isa. 10:6](#)). The city streets usually paved in Bible days would include those connected with the temple or some public building. The Oriental appreciates greatly the description of Heaven, "wherein the streets are paved with pure gold as it were transparent glass" ([Rev. 21:21](#)).

The Market Place

The market place is not only a place for the purchase of goods, it is also a place for the people to gather for many other purposes. It is one of the most popular places in an Oriental city. See [The Merchant's Place Of Business](#).

The Market Place As A Social Gathering Place

Business transactions are usually preceded by a social visit with the customer. The important people as well as the ordinary

people love to come there and meet their friends and greet them in true Oriental fashion, which always takes much time. Jesus said to his disciples: "Beware of the scribes, which love to go in long clothing, and love salutations in the market places" ([Mark 12:38](#)). Discussions of various kinds are entered into at the market. The Apostle Paul took advantage of such an opportunity when he was at Athens. "Therefore disputed he in the market [place] daily with them that met with him" ([Acts 17:17](#)). The market place was an ideal location for heralding the gospel.

The Heavy-laden Porter In The Market Place



Heavily laden Porter

Picture:

Heavily laden Porter

In many Eastern cities, carriages or carts are not allowed to enter the city gates and carry loads to the market place. These loads of produce are carried by porters. These men are, as a rule, taken from the poorest of men. What a sight it is to see them laden down with tremendous burdens on their backs! Sometimes two of these porters will stand back to back with their loads locked together and thus rest their tired bodies for a time before proceeding on their way.

Jesus condemned the lawyers of his day with words that doubtless refer to their treatment of these porters. "Woe unto you also, ye lawyers! for ye lade men with burdens grievous to be borne, and ye yourselves touch not the burdens with one of your fingers" ([Luke 11:46](#)). Perhaps Paul was thinking of porters when he said to the Galatians, "Bear ye one another's burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ" ([Gal. 6:2](#)). And Jesus must have had in mind especially the poor porters of his day so laden down with burdens, when he gave that most gracious invitation, "Come unto me all ye that labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest" ([Matt. 11:28](#)).

Children In The Market Place

In the Orient children always love to go to the market place, where so many interesting things are happening. They watch with keen interest everything that happens there. They may play pranks, and of course they have their games. Jesus used a

crowd of such youngsters as an illustration in one of his sermons. When the suggestion was made by some of them that they "play wedding," and later that they "play funeral," the rest of them balked at both suggestions. Jesus said: "But whereunto shall I liken this generation? It is like unto children sitting in the markets, and calling unto their fellows, and saying, We have piped unto you, and ye have not danced; we have mourned unto you, and ye have not lamented" ([Matt. 11:16, 17](#))

Laborers In The Market Place

In the Eastern city men who want employment stand in groups in the market place, waiting for someone to hire them. It was here that the man in the parable of Jesus went to secure workmen for his vineyard. "And he went out about the third hour, and saw others standing idle in the market place, and said unto them; Go ye also into the vineyard" ([Matt. 20:3, 4](#)). These men do not apply for work as is done in the Occident, rather they wait in the market place for some man to come and hire them.

Rulers In The Market Place

At certain times members of the city council will be found there, and they will listen to the case of those who are in trouble. What is done there is of course unofficial because the real court is at the city gates, or as we would say, the courthouse. Paul and Silas were taken before the magistrates in Philippi: "They caught Paul and Silas, and drew them into the market place unto the rulers" ([Acts 16:19](#)).

Presence Of Beggars

In Eastern cities there are usually many beggars. *In Old Testament times* the idea of a beggar going from door to door to ask for alms was little known among the Jews. The law of Moses provided for the needy by requiring that the Jews purposely leave some of the harvest for the poor. Also mortgaged property was returned to the original owner at the year of Jubilee. However, beggars were not entirely unknown, for Hannah speaks of them in her song of thanksgiving ([1Sam. 2:8](#)). The Psalmist promised that beggary would be the lot of the wicked ([Psa. 109:10](#)), and also that the righteous would be kept from the necessity for it ([Psa. 37:25](#))

In New Testament times beggars were usually the blind, maimed, or diseased. Thus blind Bartimeus "sat by the highway side begging" ([Mark 10:46](#)). The impotent man "was carried, whom they laid daily at the gate of the temple which is called Beautiful, to ask alms of them that entered into the temple" ([Acts 3:2](#)). The beggar Lazarus, who was diseased, was laid at the gate of "a certain rich man" ([Luke 16:19, 20](#)). Thus did these needy ones ask alms of those who passed their way. Today in the East a poor sick man is sometimes placed in a booth alongside the door of a rich man's house, and lives by means of the gifts of those who pass by him.

CHAPTER 25

CUSTOMS REGARDING PROPERTY

Measuring And Allotting The Land

MEASURING THE LAND. It has been the custom even in modern times in parts of northern Palestine and in the Plain of the Philistines to assign land periodically for farming purposes. The land thus assigned is measured by a cord. The Psalmist indicates that this same method was used for measurement of the land of Canaan when it was assigned to the tribes of Israel. "He cast out the heathen also before them, and divided them an inheritance by line" ([Psa. 78:55](#)). The prophet Amos predicted that the land would be similarly measured and assigned by the foreign foe after its capture. "Thy land shall be divided by line" ([Amos 7:17](#)).

Allotting Land

When land has been measured, "the lot" determines what section each man will secure. Those wishing to farm this land gather together usually at a threshing floor, where the man in charge of operations has a bag and pebbles. A certain distinguishing mark is put on each pebble to indicate the portion of land it represents. Then these small stones are put in the bag, and the bag is given to a small boy, who takes out the pebbles one by one, and hands one to each man desiring the use of the land. Each man upon receiving his "lot," says: "May God maintain my lot." This reminds the Bible reader of the words of the Psalm writer: "Thou maintainest my lot" ([Psa. 16:5](#)). Each man soon discovers whether his portion is desirable or not. David used this as an illustration of God's goodness to him, when he said, "The lines are fallen unto me in pleasant places; yea, I have a goodly heritage" ([Psa. 16:6](#)). It would seem, then, that the method used for allotting land by certain Arabs in modern days is similar to that used by the Jews in the days of the Old Testament.

The Importance Of Landmarks

In Bible lands, when those who have the old-time customs, want to prove the extent of their property, whether it is held temporarily or permanently, landmarks hold an important place. The boundary line is marked by a double furrow, but at each end of the furrow a heap of stones, called "the stones of the boundary," is placed. If the rain does away with the furrow line, the landmark is still there to indicate the boundary. To remove one of these landmarks is considered to be a great sin. Sometimes small community wars have been precipitated by the removing of a landmark. The law of Moses had this statute: "Thou shalt not remove thy neighbor's landmark, which they of old time have set in thine inheritance" ([Deut. 19:14](#)).

Purchasing Of Land

Transfer Of Property And Recording Of Deeds In Ancient Times

Jeremiah's account of his purchase of a field gives us the procedure in Old Testament times. Here is the way he describes it:

And I bought the field of Hanameel my uncle's son, that was in Anathoth, and weighed him the money, even seventeen shekels of silver. And I subscribed the evidence, and sealed it, and took witnesses, and weighed him the money in the balances. So I took the evidence of the purchase, both that which was sealed according to the law and custom, and that which was open: and I gave the evidence of the purchase unto Baruch the son of Neriah, the son of Maaseiah, in the sight of Hanameel mine uncle's son, and in the presence of the witnesses that subscribed the book of the purchase, before all the Jews that sat in the court of the prison ([Jer. 32:9-12](#)).

Several ancient customs are indicated here. The money was not in the form of coins. Coinage did not come into use until later than the prophet's day. Rather the money was silver that was *weighed*. The purchase was witnessed by certain Jews who "sat in the court." There were duplicate

copies of the deed made out. It was doubtless customary to seal one of these and deposit it in a safe place, which usually meant it was buried on part of the land purchased. The other copy that was open, i.e., unsealed, was placed in the public place designated for recording deeds, where it could be referred to when necessary. However, in the case of Jeremiah's purchase, both copies of the deed were preserved in an earthen vessel because the city of Jerusalem was to be destroyed.

Specific Inclusions Noted In Transfer Of Property

When purchasing property in the East, especially from the Arabs, it is important to indicate in detail just what is included in the purchase. If this is not done the new owner will discover he is not the owner of all he thought he purchased. In the Orient it sometimes happens that a man owns a well in the middle of a field belonging to another man. The reason for this is that the man in buying the field did not specify that he was buying the well located in the field. When Abraham purchased the cave of Machpelah as a burying place for Sarah, he was careful to make clear what was included. Scripture says: "The field, and the cave which was therein, and all the trees that were in the field, that were in the borders round about, were made sure unto Abraham" ([Gen. 23:17](#)).

Burying And Discovering Valuables

Through its entire history, Palestine has been a land where its inhabitants have often buried treasure in its ground. Foreign foes have many times swept through the land to plunder. In more recent years robber bands from the desert have many times rushed in to rob the inhabitants. A feeling of insecurity has caused the people of the country to seek a place to hide away valuable possessions. Therefore, many times have valuable possessions been buried in secret places. This was often done by men before leaving for battle, or before going on a long journey. If they returned safely they would be able to reclaim their buried treasure. But if they died in battle, or for any other reason failed to return, the place where the valuables were hidden would remain a lost secret. Because of this situation, there always has been a looking for hidden treasure by certain people all over the Holy Land.

The Bible contains numerous references to this pursuit. Thus it was that in the days of Job it was said: "The bitter in soul . . . long for death, but it cometh not; and dig for it more than for hid treasures" ([Job 3:20, 21](#)). One of Solomon's proverbs uses the comparison of seeking for hidden treasure: "Yea, if thou crest after knowledge, and liftest up thy voice for understanding; if thou seekest her as silver, and searchest for her as for hid treasures, then shalt thou understand the fear of the Lord, and find the knowledge of God" ([Prov. 2:3-5](#)). The most famous reference to this custom is the parable Jesus told: "The kingdom of heaven is like unto treasure hid in a field; the which when a man hath found, he hideth, and for joy thereof goeth and selleth all that he hath, and buyeth that field" ([Matt. 13:44](#)). The important consideration in this story is that hidden treasure that is discovered belongs to the man who owns the property where it is found. Hence the man in the parable sold all he possessed that he might be able to buy the field where the treasure was found, and thereby become owner of the treasure he had discovered.

Redeeming Lost Inheritances

The Old Testament law provided a way through which an inheritance that had been lost could be redeemed through a "go-el" or *kinsman-redeemer*. If a man through poverty was forced to mortgage his property, and then was unable to meet the payment on the date of maturity of the mortgage, then the man holding the mortgage could hold the land until the year of jubilee (which came every fifty years), at which time it reverted automatically to its former owner. But before this date a kinsman-redeemer (nearest male blood relation) could go into the civil court and by payment, recover the land for his relative. If the relation had died without an heir, then it became the duty of the kinsman-redeemer to marry his widow, and raise up the name of his brother.

The story of Ruth and Boaz is the Bible example of this ancient custom. Boaz redeemed the

estate of the deceased Elimelech, Naomi's husband, by marrying Ruth, the widow of one of Elimelech's sons. There was a kinsman nearer in relation than Boaz, but he chose not to be redeemer, and this left the way open for Boaz, who was next in line to become the kinsman-redeemer. In completing the transaction whereby the inheritance was redeemed and Ruth became his wife, an interesting old custom was observed. The account says: "Now this was the manner in former time in Israel concerning redeeming and concerning changing, for to confirm all things; a man plucked off his shoe, and gave it to his neighbor: and this was a testimony in Israel. Therefore the kinsman said unto Boaz, Buy it for thee. So he drew off his shoe" ([Ruth 4:7, 8](#)). Boaz took off his sandal and gave it to the owner of the mortgage as evidence of completing his act of redemption. This custom was usual in the transfer of inheritances.

CHAPTER 26

DOMESTIC ANIMALS

The Camel

VARIETY OF CAMELS IN BIBLE LANDS. The Arabian or dromedary camel, which has one hump on its back, is the one in use in Syria and Palestine today, and is the kind found among the desert Arabs of the East. The Bactrian camel, that has two bumps, comes from another region altogether, and is rarely seen in Bible lands. It was the Arabian camel that was used in Bible times.

By Whom The Camel Was Used

The camel was used largely by the early Hebrew patriarchs. These men measured their wealth by the number of domestic animals they possessed, and camels were included among them. "Abram had sheep, oxen, she-asses, and camels" ([Gen. 12:16](#)). Rebekah rode on a camel on her trip to become the bride of Isaac ([Gen. 24:64](#)). "Jacob had much cattle, asses, and camels" ([Gen. 30:43](#)). It was a company of Ishmeelites with their caravan of camels that carried Joseph down into Egypt ([Gen. 37:25, 28](#)). The patriarch Job had three thousand camels before his testing experience, and this number was doubled afterwards ([Job 1:3; Job 42:12](#)).

The Hebrew people as a whole during most of the Old Testament times did not make large use of the camel. Living in hilly country, and being a pastoral and agricultural people, they did not have so much need for the camel. Their kings usually possessed camels which were used for travel and transport purposes. Thus Scripture says King David had many camels, some of which had been captured in war ([1Sam. 27:9](#)).

The Camel's Use Of Water

Surely, this animal was divinely designated for desert country. Its remarkable characteristic is of course its ability to go for a long time without drinking water. This does not mean that it can get along with less water than other animals, but simply that it has the ability to store up water in a series of cells or sacks with which its interior region is furnished. The camel is able to consume as much as nine gallons at a single drink, and this water taken in a few minutes will last it for several days. A camel that is thirsty for water has been known to scent water at a great distance, and will go at great speed to the spot where the water is located. When camel caravans unexpectedly run out of water, the men will sometimes kill one of the camels and extract from its stomach water enough to save the life of the people in the caravan.

The Process Of Watering The Camels

Genesis tells how Rebekah watered the camels of Abraham's servant: "And she hastened, and emptied her pitcher into the trough, and ran again unto the well to draw water, and drew for all his camels" ([Gen. 24:20](#)). The Bedouin Arabs of the desert do not water their camels at all in winter if their grazing is good. When the weather begins to warm up, they water them every week or nine days. As the summer becomes hotter, the camels are watered oftener, until the very hot weather when they are watered under ordinary conditions every other day. Leather buckets are usually utilized to draw the water out of the well, and a leather receptacle serves as trough, out of which the camels drink the water poured therein. This trough is supported by wooden stands, and is kept in the tent of the desert Arab ready for use when it comes time to water the camels. *The camel's food.* Under ordinary conditions, the camels are fed teben, which is the short straw that comes from the Oriental threshing floors. Each camel caravan will carry some of this packed closely in bags. But when on a journey and it becomes necessary, the camel often lives on what can be found by it along the way, even in desert country. It is able to make good use of the scanty herbage to be found in those regions. Under these circumstances its favorite food is a shrub that is called ghada, that has slender little green twigs. It also makes use of a thornbush which it is able to devour because it has a hard and horny palate. Camels have been known to travel for twenty days without receiving anything as food except what they discovered for themselves along the way.

The Camel's Feet

These are indeed made for desert traveling. They consist of two toes that are long and that rest upon hard elastic cushions that have a horny and tough sole. The soft cushions of their feet cause their tread to be as noiseless as that of a cat. Thus the camels do not sink in the desert sands, and the toughness of their feet enables them to stand the burning soil, and the stones that are often mixed with the sand.

The Camel's Hump

This serves important purposes. It makes it possible for the back of the animal to receive burdens that are to be transported. And the fatty matter that accumulates in the bump provides a supply of reserve energy which can be utilized by the animal as occasion demands. The condition of the bump is always examined when an Oriental buys a camel.

Mounting A Camel

This is not an easy art for a Westerner to learn. It would be impossible to do this while the animal is standing, and so it is trained to kneel and stay in this position until the rider has mounted it. It is natural for the camel to kneel because it is born with warts on the legs and breast which serve as cushions to rest its weight when kneeling. When it kneels it begins by dropping on its knees, and then on the joints of the hind legs, then it drops on its breast, and finally on its hind legs that are bent. In rising, the process is reversed: the hind quarters rise first, tending to throw the rider forward, after which the front quarters rise rapidly, tending to throw the rider backward, then the forward movement of the animal would tend to throw the rider forward again. An experienced camel rider sways to and fro, yielding his body to the movements of the animal. This movement of the camel causes some inexperienced riders to have "seasickness." Most Westerners who attempt to ride the camel find the journey to be a very uncomfortable one. Abraham's servant "made his camels to kneel down without the city by a well at the time of the evening,

even the time that women go out to draw water" ([Gen. 24:11](#)).

The Equipment Used By Desert Arabs For Travel By Camel

This includes a camel saddle which has two tall pommels in front and behind; large saddlebags that hang down on each side of the saddle, a leather apron that hangs down in front of the saddle, stretching down on the sides of the camel's neck almost to its knees; the camel stick; a leather bag containing dates; and other bags with supplies.

Camel Furniture For Women

Sometimes the women ride the camels in the same way that the men do, but more often a special arrangement of saddle takes care of them. "Camel furniture" was a part of Jacob's traveling equipment for his womenfolk, and when such was placed in Rachel's tent, she hid the stolen teraphim therein ([Gen. 31:34](#), A. R. V.). They often sit in large basket-like appendages which have been slung on each side of the animal." Another common arrangement for the wives of sheiks was:

One made of two slabs, or planks of wood, about ten feet in length, which were fastened upon the frame of the saddle and at right angles to it. From the end of those, ropes were stretched over upright posts fixed above the middle of the saddle, to support an awning under which the women sat upon quilts and cushions.

Such an arrangement served the same purpose as a western umbrella.

Camel Ornaments

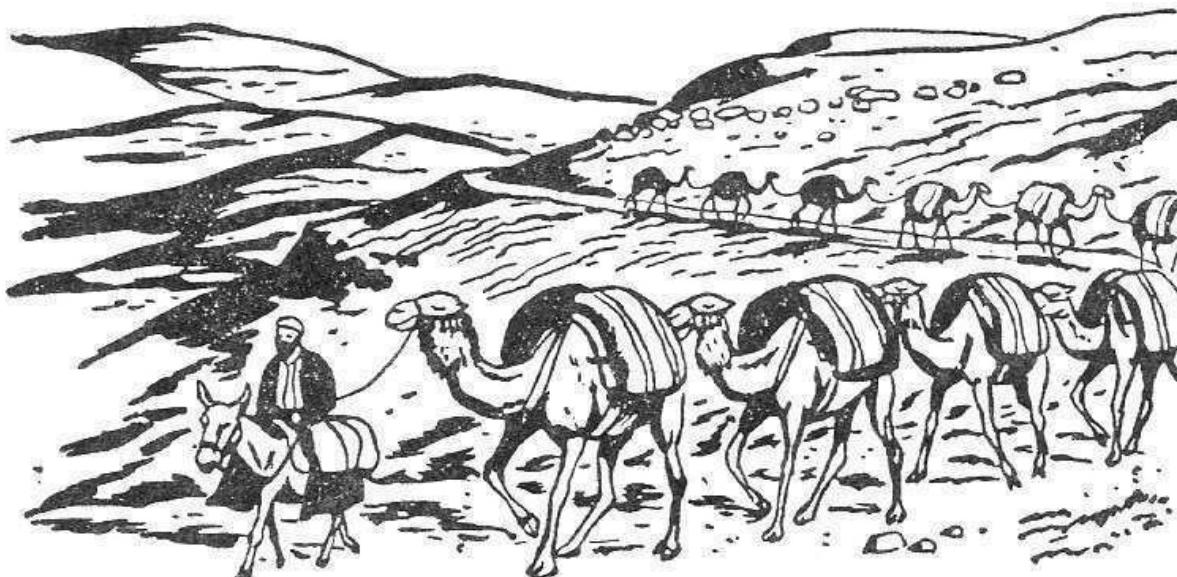
These have been widely used in the East. Owners of camels often put various ornaments on their favorite animals. Sometimes they cover the collars with cowrie shells which are sewn on them according to a pattern. Ornaments that are crescent-shaped are sewn on red cloth and make a jingling sound with each step of the animal. Often, ornaments of silver are displayed on the camel's neck. Concerning Gideon, Scripture says: "And Gideon arose, and slew Zebah and Zalmunna, and took the crescents that were on their camels' necks ([Judges 8:21](#), A. R. V.). Thus the camels ornaments of that day were the same as used by the Arabs of today.

The Camel As A Beast Of Burden

Through the centuries the camel has been used for carrying burdens. In the Bible, "forty camels' burden," is referred to in one passage ([2Kings 8:9](#)); and in another, bread was carried on "asses, and on camels, and on mules, and on oxen" ([1Chron. 12:40](#)). In still another, treasures were to be carried on the humps of camels ([Isa. 30:6](#)). A special packsaddle is used when the animals carry loads.

A narrow bag about eight feet long is made, and rather loosely stuffed with straw or similar material. It is then doubled, and the ends firmly sewn together, so as to form a great ring, which is placed over the hump, and forms a tolerably flat surface. A wooden framework is tied on the packsaddle, and is kept in its place by a girth and a crupper. The packages which the camel is to carry are fastened together by cords, and slung over the saddle. They are only connected by those semi-knots called "hitches," so that when the camel is to be unloaded, all that is needed is to pull the lower end of the rope, and the packages fall on either side of the animal. So quickly is the operation of loading performed, that a couple of experienced men can load a camel in very little more than a minute.

Camel Caravans



Camel Caravan

Camel Caravan

Picture:

It is camel caravans that have been largely used to transport goods from one country to another in Bible lands, or to go a great

distance especially in desert territory. Isaiah prophesied to the Dedanites, who were caravan merchants between the shores of the Persian Gulf and Palestine: "In the forest in Arabia shall ye lodge, O ye caravans of Dedanites" ([Isa. 21:13](#), A. R. V.). The number of camels in a caravan in modern times has differed widely, but one writer tells of joining a caravan which was divided into four companies, and the first three of these numbered sixteen hundred camels. The usual arrangement of a caravan is a string of camels with each one tied to the one before it, and the leader of the caravan either riding on the back of, or walking by the side of a donkey. A cord from the first camel in the line, is tied to a ring that is fastened to leather strips on the hips of the donkey. Thus the camels learn to follow implicitly the donkey that heads the procession.

The Social Influence Of The Caravans

In ancient times as well as today, in large sections of the Orient, the caravans take the place of newspaper, telephone, and radio. Ordinarily, the knowledge of what was going on was limited on the part of the women to what they heard at the village oven, or the village well; and on the part of the men, to what they heard at the village guest room, or at the gates of the city. But when a caravan arrived in the village, it was an event of great importance, because there was always news brought from a distance. The familiar proverb must have referred to such an event: "As cold waters to a thirsty soul, so is good news from a far country" ([Prov. 25:25](#)).

The Swift Arabian Camel

This animal is often called the *deloul*, has long and wiry limbs, and is without superfluous fat. Its shoulders are broad and its hump small, although hard and firm. It is an ungainly looking creature, but the Arab is very fond of this animal. The ordinary camel travels along at the rate of about three miles an hour, whereas the deloul if not heavily loaded will traverse nine or ten miles an hour. Some of the natives even claim that this animal can outrun a race horse. Jeremiah the prophet speaks of "a swift dromedary traversing her ways" ([Jer. 2:23](#)). The movements of this swift animal are hard on the rider, who usually prepares for the trip by "belting himself tightly with two leathern bands, one just under the arms, and the other round the pit of the stomach."

Various Camel Products

The Arab of today makes use of camel meat and camel milk. The Mosaic law forbade the Jews to use camel meat "because he cheweth the cud, but divideth not the hoof; he is unclean unto you" ([Lev. 11:4](#)). It is possible that they did use the milk, at least in patriarchal times (cf. [Gen. 32:15](#)). Camel's hair serves many purposes in the Orient. At the right season of the year it is removed in tufts and the women spin it into strong thread. Various coarse fabrics are made from this thread. The Bedouin tents are sometimes made of camels hair, as are also carpets, rugs, "abayas" or the outer garments, and other items. Matthew says of John the Baptist that he "had his raiment of camel's hair" ([Matt. 3:4](#)). The camels skin is made into leather and from this material are made sandals, leggings, and water bottles. Even the dung of camels is commonly used for fuel.

Two References To The Camel In Christ's Sermons

The first reference is given by all three synoptic Gospel writers: "It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle, than for a rich man to enter into the kingdom of God" ([Matt. 19:24](#); [Mark 10:25](#); [Luke 18:25](#)). It must be remembered that Orientals are very fond of exaggeration as a figure of speech, and so would appreciate this hyperbole that Jesus used. In Luke's account, the word ordinarily referring to a surgeon's needle was the one used by the writer of the third Gospel, who was himself a physician. The words that Jesus added, need to be taken with his statement: "With men this is impossible; but with God all things are possible" ([Matt. 19:26](#)). The other reference to the camel was given when Jesus was denouncing the Scribes and Pharisees, and said to them: "Ye blind guides, that strain out the gnat, and swallow the camel!" ([Matt. 23:24](#), A. R. V.). The reference here is to the ancient custom of filtering wine. The gnat and the camel are in striking contrast to each other in size. The use of the camel here was obviously a hyperbole, but was appropriate, not only because of its great size, but because to the Jews it was an unclean animal (because it does not divide the hoof, although it does chew the cud). The Pharisees were careful to strain out the smallest creature, but swallowed the larger one. They were scrupulous about small things, but very careless about the more important matters.

The Donkey

The Donkey As The Oriental Pack Animal

He has been the beast of burden from time immemorial. The packsaddle used with this animal differed somewhat according to the load being carried. When firewood was carried, a crosstree was used as a saddle. No doubt Abraham loaded his donkey in this way with wood for the sacrifice he was to make ([Gen. 22:3](#)). When sheaves of grain were carried by the donkey, a kind of cradle was either suspended to the crosstree or to the flat saddle. This saddle had as its under layer thick felt, and as its upper layer haircloth, with a padding of straw or sedges between. When sacks of grain or cut straw are carried, they are thrown over this saddle and tied with a rope going under the beast's breast. The sons of Jacob probably packed their donkeys in this way ([Gen. 42:26, 27](#)). Large baskets are used for carrying bread and other provisions. If fruit is being taken, two boxes are slung in a similar way. Jesse and Abigail doubtless packed their donkeys in such a way when they sent their presents ([1Sam. 16:20](#); [1Sam. 25:18](#)). Children are often carried in larger boxes on the donkeys. Sacks of grain are sometimes slung across the bare back of the donkey.

The Donkey Sometimes Utilized For Ploughing

The ox has been more generally used for this purpose, but occasionally the donkey becomes the animal to pull the Oriental plough. The prophet Isaiah speaks of both the ox and the donkey being used thus: "Blessed are ye that sow beside all waters, that send forth thither the feet of the ox and the ass" ([Isa. 32:20](#)). The law of Moses forbade the mixed yoke, i.e., ploughing with an ox and a donkey together, or any other combination (cf. [Deut. 22:10](#)).

The Donkey Sometimes Used For Grinding Grain

Here again, the usual method of grinding the grain is for the women to use smaller stones for their mills. The larger mill is

elevated so that a single tree becomes suitable for the work. A camel may be used in place of a donkey. It was this type of a mill that the Philistines required Samson to pull ([Judges 16:21](#)). Jesus referred to this larger type of millstone when he said: "But whoso shall cause one of these little ones that believe on me to stumble, it is profitable for him that a *millstone turned by an ass* should be hanged about his neck, and that he should be sunk in the depth of the sea" ([Matt. 18:6](#), A. R. V. margin). The size and weight of this stone made its illustrative use by Jesus very forceful.

The Donkey Used For Riding



Traveling by Donkey

Picture:

Traveling by Donkey

Before the tenth century B. C. it was used more than any other animal for this purpose. At that time, the mule came into use, especially among the rich, but the donkey has continued to be in use by many through the years.

Riding The Donkey Not Considered A Mark Of Humility

Rich people and important people rode on this animal. Of Abraham Scripture records that he "rose up early in the morning, and saddled his ass" ([Gen. 22:3](#)). Concerning one of the judges it was said, "And after him arose Jair, a Gileadite, and judged Israel twenty and two years. And he had thirty sons that rode on thirty ass colts, and they had thirty cities" ([Judges 10:3, 4](#)). Also Achsah, the daughter of Caleb ([Judges 1:14](#)), and Abigail, the wife of wealthy Nabal ([1Sam. 25:23](#)), each rode on an ass.

White Donkeys Used By Persons Of High Rank

"Speak, ye that ride on white asses, ye that sit in judgment, and walk by the way" ([Judges 5:10](#)). These white donkeys are used today in many places in the East by people of high social standing. They are usually larger animals and are supposed to be swifter.

The Donkey Used As A Symbol Of Peace-times

The horse has usually symbolized times of war, but the donkey, times of peace. In Old Testament times this was especially true from the days of King Solomon. This fact helps to explain the words of the prophet about the Messiah that were fulfilled in the triumphant entrance of Jesus into Jerusalem: "Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion; shout, O daughter of Jerusalem: behold, thy king, cometh unto thee; he is just, and having salvation; lowly, and riding upon an ass, even upon a colt the foal of an ass" ([Zech. 9:9](#); cf. [John 12:15](#)). Here the use by Jesus of the donkey was to signify that He was Prince of Peace, rather than Captain of an army, when He entered the Holy City.

Drivers Sometimes Used For Donkeys

When women rode on donkeys, it was customary at times to have a driver for the animal. Thus it says concerning the trip made by the woman of Shunem: "Then she saddled an ass, and said to her servant, Drive, and go forward; slack not thy riding for me, except I bid thee" ([2Kings 4:24](#)). On the journey made by Moses and his family ([Exod. 4:20](#)), his wife and sons were mounted on their donkey while Moses no doubt walked alone, beside the animal. Because of this arrangement of travel for the journey of Moses and his family, it is believed by many that Mary and the child Jesus rode on the donkey ([Matt. 2:13-15](#)), and Joseph walked alongside in their flight into Egypt. However, in the Orient, many times husband and wife are seen to ride both of them on the backs of a donkey.

Special Donkey Riding-saddles

Those used in the Orient today are rather large. A cloth of wool folded several times is spread over the animal's back. On this is placed a thick pad of straw which is covered with carpet. It is flat on top instead of being rounded. The pommel is quite high, and a cloth or carpet of bright color is often thrown over the saddle. This usually has fringed edges and tassels. It is quite likely that the saddle of Bible times was much simpler than this arrangement. It was probably a simple covering of cloth or skin which was used for the convenience of the rider, and especially to protect the animal from chafing.

Mules

Mules Used By The Arabs Of Bible Lands

They scarcely ever breed the mule themselves, but instead import them from either the Lebanon district of Syria, or from Cyprus. The Arabs very seldom use the mule for the purposes of agriculture, but rather use it for riding or for carrying of burdens particularly in rocky country.

Mules Used In Later Old Testament Times

The mule is not mentioned in the Bible until the reign of King David. The law of Moses prohibited the rearing of any animals which were the result of the union of different species ([Lev. 19:19](#)). So the Jews never bred mules, but evidently they thought the law did not prohibit them from using them. From the days of King David, they came to be used as beasts of burden, and for the saddle, and were imported from other countries, especially Egypt. Included in the tribute which King Solomon received from other nations was a quantity of "mules, a rate year by year" ([1Kings 10:24, 25; 2Chron. 9:24](#)). The first Scriptural reference to the mule is in connection with the sheep-shearing feast planned by Absalom for the plot against Amnon. It says: "All the king's sons arose, and every man got him up upon his mule, and fled" ([2Sam, 13:29](#)). Each prince had a mule for his personal travel use, and thus this animal had taken the place of the donkey for such use. The mule was used by King David when he traveled in state, and to ride upon the mule belonging to the king was considered to be much the same thing as sitting upon the throne of the king. Thus David said concerning Solomon whom he wanted to make king to succeed him: "Take with you the servants of your lord, and cause Solomon my son to ride upon mine own mule, and bring him down to Gihon" ([1Kings 1:33](#)). When Adonijah, who attempted to usurp the throne against the wishes of his father, heard that Solomon had ridden on the mule of David, he knew thereby that he had been made the new king ([1Kings 1:44 f](#)). By the time of Isaiah, the mule was in common use. The prophet says: "And they shall bring all your brethren for an offering unto the Lord out of all nations upon horses, and in chariots, and in litters, and upon mules, and upon swift beasts, to my holy mountain Jerusalem" ([Isa. 66:20](#)). Kings had especially made use of them, as Ahab who was much concerned about keeping his mules alive in time of famine ([1Kings 18:5](#)). The Bible does not anywhere mention the obstinate disposition of the mule. A reference by the Psalmist says: "Be ye not as the horse, or as the mule, which have no understanding: whose mouth must be held in with bit and bridle, lest they come near unto thee" ([Psa. 32:9](#)). But this is not a reference to that trait of character for which the mule is noted today in the West. The New Testament does not mention the mule.

Horses

Bible Time Horse Same As Arab Horse Today

Assyrian and Egyptian sculpture would indicate that the horse of Bible times was the same as the Arabs use today. In those days the horse was used mainly for war purposes, although Isaiah, in connection with threshing, speaks of the use of horses ([Isa. 28:28](#)), thus indicating that to a limited degree at least, horses were used in agriculture. But today the Arabs make much use of horses for riding. The horse is looked upon as part of the Arab's family. Although it is heavily bitted, the reins are rarely used. It is controlled by the rider's voice. When the camp or oasis is reached, the horses are unsaddled or unharnessed and allowed to roam free. They will graze around the place and always come when called. Hoofs of the Arab horses are never shod, this practice being made useless by the hot climate. In ancient days the same thing was true. In Scripture the quality of a horse was judged partially by the hardness of its hoofs. Isaiah said: "Their horses' hoofs shall be counted like flint" ([Isa. 5:28](#)). Micah wrote: "I will make thy hoofs brass" ([Micah 4:13](#)).

Care Of Horses

In Old Testament days the horse was cared for much as it is by the Arab today. In addition to the use of grass in grazing, the horses were fed barley and cut straw. Thus both "barley also and straw for the horses" ([1Kings 4:28](#)), were in use in King Solomon's time. The Psalmist indicates the use of bit and bridle: "Be ye not as the horse ... whose mouth must be held in with bit and bridle" ([Psa. 32:9](#)). And the Book of Proverbs speaks of "a whip for the horse" ([Prov. 26:3](#)).

Horses And Chariots Used In Egypt From Early Times

Joseph rode in "the second chariot" which King Pharaoh had ([Gen. 41:43](#)). When the Israelites made their escape from the bondage of Egypt, they were pursued by "all the horses and chariots of Pharaoh, and his horsemen, and his army" ([Exod. 14:9](#)). In later years, Egypt was the main source for the supply of horses used by the kings of Israel ([1Kings 10:28, 29](#)).

Regulation In The Law Of Moses Concerning Horses

The Book of Deuteronomy was explicit about the use of horses by future kings of Israel. Concerning a ruler it was said: "But he shall not multiply horses to himself, nor cause the people to return to Egypt, to the end that he should multiply horses: forasmuch as the Lord hath said unto you, Ye shall henceforth return no more that way" ([Deut. 17:16](#)).

Use Of Horse And Chariot Impractical In Much Of Canaan

This was due to the mountainous character of much of the country. This was especially true of most of Judea and Samaria, except on the main roads through this territory. This is the reason for their absence in the battles that took place there.

Horses And Chariots Not Used In Conquest Of Canaan

Joshua did not make use of them in his conquest of Canaan. There is no record that he made use of either cavalry or of chariots in his warfare. But Moses had predicted that Israel would have to face enemies that did have their horses and chariots. "When thou goest out to battle against thine enemies, and seest horses, and chariots, and a people more than thou, be not afraid of them: for the Lord thy God is with thee, which brought thee up out of the land of Egypt" ([Deut. 20:1](#)). When Joshua went against such foes and conquered them, he was commanded by God to cut the hamstrings of captured horses, and to burn the chariots thus secured. The Bible records his obedience to this command ([Josh. 11:6, 9](#)).

War Chariots Used By Israel's Enemies In The Days Of The Judges

When the Canaanites oppressed Israel in those days "the children of Israel cried unto the Lord: for he [i.e., the Canaanitish king] had nine hundred chariots of iron" ([Judges 4:3](#)). But the Lord gave Israel victory over these chariots without the Hebrews themselves using such implements of warfare.

King David's Use Of Horses

David made some use of horses in battle. On the occasion of his victory over Hadadezer, King of Zobah, "David houghed all the chariot horses, but reserved of them for an hundred chariots" ([2Sam. 8:3, 4](#)). Doubtless he wanted these chariots and their horses for battle use on the flat ground of his country.

King Solomon's Excessive Use Of Horses

He disregarded the Law of Moses, and began to import great numbers of horses and chariots from the land of Egypt. "And Solomon had horses brought out of Egypt ... and a chariot came up and went out of Egypt for six hundred shekels of silver, and an horse for an hundred and fifty" ([1Kings 10:28, 29](#)). He had many stalls made for his large number of chariot horses and cavalry. These animals were stationed in chariot cities where the stalls were constructed ([1Kings 4:26; 2Chron. 1:14; 2Chron. 9:25](#)). Archaeologists have uncovered the ancient city of Megiddo, which was one of Solomon's chariot cities, and there in the southeast corner of the tell (ancient mound) was discovered that which gives every evidence of being the stables of Solomon. Between four and five hundred of these stables were laid bare with nearby quarters for the grooms who cared for the horses. A manger was located in front of each horse. Massive stone hitching posts remain with holes in them for inserting the halter-shanks.

Use Of Horses And Chariots By Kings Of Judah And Israel

Following the example of Solomon, the kings that followed during the history of the divided kingdom, made use of horses and chariots. King Ahab died in his battle chariot in war with the Syrians ([1Kings 22:35](#)). And the prophet Isaiah warned the kings of his day against going down to Egypt for help in securing horses for the day of battle. "Woe to them that go down to Egypt for help; and stay on horses, and trust in chariots, because they are many; and in horsemen, because they are very strong, but they look not unto the Holy One of Israel" ([Isa. 31:1](#)).

Use Of Horses And Chariots In Time Of Peace

It was mainly kings or men of wealth or position who used chariots drawn by horses in times of peace. As prince, Absalom rode in a chariot, and King Rehoboam and King Ahab had their chariots in which they rode in state ([2Sam. 15:1](#)), Absalom; ([1Kings 12:18](#)), Rehoboam; ([1Kings 18:44](#)), Ahab. And Jeremiah made this prophecy concerning the city of Jerusalem: "Then shall there enter into the gates of this city kings and princes sitting upon the throne of David, riding in chariots and on horses, they, and their princes" ([Jer. 17:25](#)). In New Testament times the use of chariots was also limited to men of prominence. The Ethiopian eunuch of Queen Candace rode in a chariot when Philip joined him and won him to Christ ([Acts 8:28](#) f). In the Apocalypse, the noise of the judgment locusts is compared to "the sound of chariots of many horses" ([Rev. 9:9](#)).

Description Of Ancient Chariots

There have been numbers of pictorial representations of ancient chariots discovered by archaeologists. These give a fair idea of what they were like. These implements so often used in warfare were very simple in style and yet very uncomfortable for the occupants. They were "semicircular boxes on wheels and of very small size. They were hung very low, so that the occupants could step in and out without trouble." There were no springs, but the floor was made of a network of rope stretched so as to be elastic and thus overcome some of the effects of the jolting. Often two horses pulled one chariot. In battle it was customary to have two men in each chariot, one to drive the horses, and the other to do the fighting.

Figurative Use Of Chariots And White Horses

Chariots and white horses were often used as figures of speech in the Bible. Chariots are referred to as symbols of power. Thus God "maketh the clouds his chariots" ([Psa. 104:3](#)). The Lord is said to have his army of angels and many chariots: "The chariots of God are twenty thousand, even thousands of angels" ([Psa. 68:17](#)). And concerning the coming of the Lord, Isaiah prophesied: "The Lord will come with fire, and with his chariots like a whirlwind" ([Isa. 66:15](#)). The coming of Christ to fight the battle of Armageddon is predicted to be on a white horse, and the armies that follow him from Heaven will be upon white horses ([Rev. 19:11, 14](#)). Generals of armies have usually been known to ride upon white horses, and so as General of a great army,

Christ will ride such an animal; and since His saints share with Him in the victory, it is appropriate that they too shall ride upon white horses.

Cattle

The domestic cattle of Palestine have been much like those raised in the West, only there have not been as many kinds of breed. In the time of Israel's prosperity, cattle were much more numerous than they have been among the Arabs today, and were probably better developed animals. The ancient Jews used the cattle for sacrifices, and for this purpose they had to be without flaws. The Arabs do not use cattle for meat very much, but rather use sheep and goat meat. Various words are used in our English Bible to indicate cattle. The word "ox" is often used, and it is sometimes indicated that this animal was especially fattened for table use. "Better is a dinner of herbs where love is, than a stalled ox and hatred therewith" ([Prov. 15:17](#)). The words "bull" or "bullock" are used in Scripture to designate the male cattle. The bullock was one of the animals that could be offered under the law of Moses as a burnt offering ([Lev. 1:5](#)). Milk-giving cows, sometimes called "milch kine," were in common use ([1Sam. 6:7](#); [Deut. 32:14](#)). Bull calves were often used in Bible times for meat. But the chief use of oxen was by the farmer in his various activities. The Jews used the oxen where the modern farmer has used the horse. Oxen were put under the yoke and made to pull the plow. Cows as well as bulls were utilized, the latter having been castrated. "Elisha was plowing with twelve yoke of oxen" ([1Kings 19:19](#)). Oxen were used in threshing grain. "Thou shalt not muzzle the ox when he treadeth out the corn [grain]" ([Deut. 25:4](#)).

During part of the year, the cattle in Palestine are allowed to graze. In the thickly populated sections, a boy will act as herdsman to see that they do no harm. But in the thinly populated districts, the farmers will sometimes turn their herds loose and let the cattle forage, hunting their own pasturage. While doing this they take on some of the characteristics of a wild animal. The Bible refers to some of these habits. The Psalmist cried: "Many bulls have compassed me, strong bulls of Bashan have beset me round. They gaped upon me with their mouths, as a ravening and a roaring lion" ([Psa. 22:12](#)). The prophet Joel referred to the custom of turning herds loose to search for their own pastures: "How do the beasts groan! the herds of cattle are perplexed, because they have no pasture" ([Joel 1:18](#)). Under the dire conditions described by the prophet, the cattle could find no pasturage.

Special Use Of The Fatted Calf

The "fatted calf" as used by the Jews served a special purpose. This calf was stall-fed as is indicated by the prophet Malachi: "And grow up as calves of the stall" ([Mal. 4:2](#)). This animal is not only allowed to eat all that he wants to eat, but he is forced to eat more. The whole family, and especially the children, are interested in feeding it. It is fattened up in order that it may be killed for some special occasion. Two occasions called for the slaying of this animal. First, if a special guest was to be received and thus honored, the calf was then killed. When the witch of Endor entertained King Saul with a meal, the account says that she "had a fat calf in the house; and she hasted, and killed it" ([1Sam. 28:24](#)). The well-known New Testament example was when the prodigal's father said to his servants, "Bring hither the fatted calf, and kill it; and let us eat, and be merry" ([Luke 15:23](#)). It was the custom to kill the animal, cook it, and then eat it, in quick succession. Abraham, Gideon, Manoah, the witch of Endor, as well as the prodigal's father, are examples of this. The Bedouin Arabs do this today when unexpected guests arrive. These Orientals would appear to be expert in the art. Second, the "fatted calf" was sometimes slain as a special sacrifice or offering unto the Lord. The prophet Amos mentions "the thank offerings of your fatted calves" ([Amos 5:22](#), Keil).

Dog's

There are two kinds of dogs that are referred to in the Bible. *First*, there is the wolf-like, short-haired creature, that stands guard over the tent or the house, and which barks fiercely at strangers that come that way. He will eat whatever garbage is tossed to him, and in the evening he is usually heard barking about the city (cf. [Psa. 59:6](#)). Sometimes he is allowed to be under the table ready to receive scraps given to him (cf. [Matt. 15:27](#)). *Second*, there is the shepherd dog that goes out with the shepherd to help him in rounding up the sheep. Job speaks of these animals as "the dogs of my flock" ([Job 30:1](#)). Because dogs were so often regarded as mere scavengers, the Bible does not use the word "dog" as Westerners are accustomed to think of this animal. The price of a dog was never brought to the house of the Lord ([Deut. 23:18](#)). To call anybody "a dog" was to consider him as very low down indeed ([Rev. 22:15](#)). The attitude of the Orientals toward dogs needs to be kept in mind in interpreting the Scriptures that refer to them.

CHAPTER 27

TRAVELING ON LAND AND SEA

Character And Conditions Of Oriental Traveling

THE EXPENSE, DISCOMFORT, AND DANGER OF TRAVEL. In the Orient, where modern Western customs have not displaced old-time methods, to travel is a great expense, it means much discomfort, and it involves great danger. Therefore it is done only when absolutely necessary. When a traveler sets out on his journey he must "pay all debts, provide for dependents, give parting gifts, return all articles under trust, take money and good temper for the journey, then bid farewell to all, and be merciful to the animal he rides upon." The traveling of the Apostle Paul emphasized the hardships of journeying in the East. "In journeyings often, in perils of waters, in perils of robbers . . . in perils in the wilderness . . . in weariness and painfulness, . . . in hunger and thirst, . . . in cold and nakedness" ([2Cor. 11:26, 27](#)).

Wherever it is possible to do so men travel in large groups so that they can help each other in case they meet with robbers or wild animals along the way. A guide or someone who knows the way, and especially one who is acquainted with the locations of wells or springs of water or other watering places, is invaluable to the travelers. Sometimes they depend upon a spring of water and then discover upon arrival that it has dried up. Isaiah spoke of "a spring of water, whose waters fail not" ([Isa. 58:11](#)) The Psalmist ([Psa. 107:4-7](#)) told of a caravan of travelers that lost their way in the desert, running out of food and water. After prayer, the Lord guided them to "a city of habitation."

Methods Of Travel

Traveling is sometimes done on foot, but more often on the backs of horses, mules, or donkeys, and when traveling in the desert, camels are mostly used. In order to avoid the intense heat, and to escape detection by robber tribes, traveling is often done by night. The guide will get his direction from the stars. Summer is the usual time for traveling in order to avoid the many inconveniences connected with the winter months.

Food Taken By Travelers

Travelers going a distance will carry food with them, which will include bread, parched grain, dried olives, dried figs, and dates. Most travelers in the East now, as in the days of Jesus, will not go any distance from home without taking barley bread or meal or parched grain sufficient to last for one or two days. When Jesus performed the miracle of feeding the four thousand, he said, "I have compassion on the multitude, because they continue with me now three days, and have nothing to eat: and I will not send them away fasting, lest they faint in the way" ([Matt. 15:32](#)). According to custom, the multitude would have a day or two's supply of food with them when they flocked to hear Jesus. But on the third day, seven loaves and a few small fish was all that was left

How Distances Are Often Measured In The Orient

In traveling in Bible lands, it is often customary to measure distances in units of time rather than in terms of space. One village is said to be three hours distant from another village, because it takes that long to travel from one to the other. In Old Testament days distance in traveling was similarly noted. It was "three days' journey," "seven days' journey," etc. ([Gen. 30:36](#); [Gen. 31:23](#)). In New Testament times, "a day's journey" is mentioned, and also "a Sabbath day's journey" ([Luke 2:44](#); [Acts 1:12](#)). Among the Jews a day's journey was twenty to thirty miles, but when there was a large company it would be only ten miles. A Sabbath day's journey would be a little less than two miles.

Nature Of Eastern Inns

Old Testament Inns

The inns of Old Testament days were merely stopping places for travelers overnight. In the first two books of the Bible, the word "inn" in the King James Version is translated "lodging-place" by the Revisers ([Gen. 42:27](#); [Gen. 43:21](#); [Exod. 4:24](#), cf. with A. R. V.). The word refers only to a resting-place for the night, and a tent or perhaps a cave would most likely serve the purpose.

New Testament Inns



Oriental Caravansary or Inn

Picture:

Oriental Caravansary of Inn

The inns of New Testament times were not like Western hotels. It was because hospitality was considered to be a religious duty that therefore the modern type of hotel was unknown in olden days, and also does not exist today in many sections of Bible lands. If parties of travelers are not too many in number, they will be entertained at a Bedouin tent encampment, or in a village guest room. When Mary and Joseph came to Bethlehem, Luke says: "There was no room for them in the inn" ([Luke 2:7](#)). Some Bible scholars have thought that this inn was actually a guest-chamber, because the same word is used for such a place on another occasion ([Mark 14:14](#); [Luke 22:11](#)). But surely, with so many out-of-town visitors in the village, the guest room would long ago have been utilized. This inn was most probably a place where travelers might camp overnight, and so would have to provide their own food, cooking utensils, and other provisions. There might or might not have been an innkeeper. But there was simply no space left for Mary and Joseph at this inn. See also [Bethlehem House And Manger](#).

Sometimes the inn had an innkeeper. Luke tells us how the Good Samaritan brought the poor man he was helping "to an inn, and took care of him." In this case a "host" or "innkeeper" is mentioned ([Luke 10:34, 35](#)). It would be the duty of this man to supply a few of the necessary provisions for the travelers who spent the night there.

The Oriental "caravansary" or "khan" is probably the equivalent of at least some of the "inns" of New Testament times. The "caravansary" is a large building and is usually located in a city, although sometimes it serves as a shelter in the desert. The courtyard of these buildings serves as a place to un-mount and unload the animals, and the ground floor becomes a place for the beasts to be cared for, while the travelers themselves are put upstairs. The "khan" is a smaller building which serves the same purpose, but is located in a village. Most of these are but one-story buildings, where travelers sleep close to their animals. Many of these Eastern "inns" are without any furniture, innkeeper, or food for either man or animal. The traveler under these conditions is provided shelter only, and he himself must provide everything else. When the inn does have an "innkeeper," he will sell to the travelers coffee or other provisions, and furnish fire and the means by which they may cook their own meals. He may also provide food for the animals. Where the inn is located at a strategic center, such as where caravan routes intersect each other, it may become a public gathering-place on account of bazaars and markets being held there. Animals are sometimes killed and the meat sold at these places, and often

travelers can purchase many other things at the inn.

Oriental Salutations Among Travelers



Oriental Salutations

Picture:

Oriental Salutations

When travelers in the Orient meet each other on the way, they love to engage in salutations that to the Westerner seem complicated, tedious, and time-consuming. Wordy questions will be asked each other seeking such information as this: From where have you come? Where are you going? What is your name? How many children have you? How many men belong to your clan? What enemies does your clan have? etc., etc. While such salutations are entered into, business and everything else can wait. For this reason, when Jesus sent the seventy disciples on a healing and preaching mission, he said to them: "Salute no man by the way" ([Luke 10:4](#)). To engage in such extensive salutations as were customary would have interfered with the urgent business of the Lord.

Traveling By Sea In Ancient Times

The Attitude Of The Ancients Toward The Sea

Ancient people had a great fear of the ocean, and truly there was reason for this dread, since the mariners had no chart of the seas or compass to guide them. Travel by ship was usually inconvenient, and windstorms often necessitated great delay in arrival at the desired port. Ordinarily the Mediterranean Sea was closed to sea travel during the winter months. The ship in which Paul was to sail for Rome got into difficulties because those in charge risked getting the ship to another harbor before winter set in. "And because the haven was not commodious to winter in, the more Paul advised to depart thence also, if by any means they might attain to Phenice, and there to winter" ([Acts 27:12](#)). The Psalmist has given us a graphic description of a storm at sea and God's deliverance from it ([Psa. 107:25-30](#)). The Apostle John's inspired description of Heaven was originally given to men who greatly feared the grave dangers and horrors of sea-experiences, and to them he wrote concerning the new earth: "And there was no more sea" ([Rev. 21:1](#)). Travel by sea in early days was undertaken only when absolutely necessary.

Ship Routes

It is important to remember that in Bible times, vessels that traveled in the Mediterranean Sea kept as close as possible to land. Thus the trade routes were along the coast or from one headland to another one. When the Apostle Paul was returning from one of his missionary journeys, he traveled by ship from Ephesus to Caesarea. His ship would keep near the coast going from city to city, and Paul sometimes stopped off and visited friends ([Acts 21:1-8](#)). In those days the small size of the ships often made it necessary for passengers to go ashore for the night, and finding a place there to sleep, join the ship the next day.

Shipping Nations

Egyptian ships early plied the Mediterranean Sea, and lightweight "vessels of papyrus" ([Isa. 18:1, 2](#), A. R. V.), were piloted by both Egyptians and Ethiopians on the Nile River. The Phoenicians were the most famous sea-merchants and travelers of ancient times. The ship in which Jonah took his voyage was no doubt navigated by these seamen ([Jonah 1](#)). The Islands of Crete and Cyprus became famous shipping centers, and the Philistines of old had their ships upon the waters of the Mediterranean. In New Testament times it was the Greeks and Romans who were especially noted for their shipping activities. But what about the Hebrews? Were they seamen? The patriarch Jacob made this prediction concerning the tribe of Zebulun: "He shall be for an haven of ships" ([Gen. 49:13](#)). But the Palestine seacoast was not occupied at all times by the Hebrew people. Other nations became navigators, and for the most part the Jews probably contented themselves with occasionally hiring out to these foreign sea captains as sailors. The Psalmist says: "They that go down to the sea in ships, that do business in great waters" ([Psa. 107:23](#)).

Israel did have one great experience with ships during the reign of King Solomon. David had conquered the Edomites and so came into possession of the two ports of Eloth and Ezion-geber on the Red Sea. Thus Solomon inherited good harbors for ships. Arrangements were made for Hiram, King of Tyre, to send carpenters to build ships for Solomon, " and Hiram sent in the navy his servants, shipmen that had knowledge of the sea, with the servants of Solomon. And they came to Ophir, and fetched from thence gold . . . and brought it to king Solomon" ([1Kings 9:27, 28](#)). A few years later King Jehoshaphat of Judah joined with King Ahaziah of Israel on a similar shipping expedition, but the Lord did not approve of this alliance, and so "the ships were broken at Eziongeber" ([1Kings 22:48](#)). While King Jehoram, Jehoshaphat's successor, was reigning, the Edomites freed themselves from the Hebrew yoke, and came into possession of their Red Sea ports This ended Israel's shipping experience in ocean waters for many generations to come, although Eloth has become an important port for the modern nation of Israel. In New Testament times boats were used to cross the waters of the Sea of Galilee.

How Ships Were Propelled

Two methods were used. Ships of war, although furnished with sails, were propelled mainly by means of oars. Merchant vessels depended for the most part on sails, but many of the navigators resorted to oars when it became necessary. Thus the men who piloted Jonah's ship, which was a merchant ship, "rowed hard to bring it to the land; but they could not" ([Jonah 1:13](#)). The storm was too great for them. The ship that Paul was in when the storm broke on the Mediterranean Sea was a sailing ship without oars for men to row ([Acts 27](#)).

The Phoenician Ship In Which Jonah Sailed

The first chapter of the book of Jonah gives interesting information about ancient ships. This ship was traveling from Joppa to Tarshish as a merchant ship, for when the storm came, the men "cast forth the wares that were in the ship" ([Jonah 1:5](#)). Exclusively passenger ships were little known in those days, most traveling, if not all, being done on merchant ships. Passengers, of course, paid fare for their trips, as did Jonah ([Jonah 1:3](#)). When the storm arose, the sailors discovered that "Jonah was gone down into the sides of the ship" ([Jonah 1:5](#)). This means he had gone "below deck," into the lower room of the ship. The word "shipmaster" used in verse 6, ([John 1:6](#)) means the chief of the sailors, or as we would say, the captain of the ship. [Verse 13](#), ([Jonah 1:13](#)) mentions the use of oars when the ship was in the storm, in a futile effort to bring it to shore.

Luke's Account Of Paul's Voyage To Rome

Luke's report of Paul's sea journey in [Acts 27](#) and [Acts 28](#) is the most accurate account of a sea voyage that has come to us from olden times. We gain more knowledge of these ships from this story than from any other source." In the second half of the nineteenth century, Mr. James Smith made a detailed study of Paul's voyage, traveling by ship himself where Paul's trip took him. By means of admiralty charts and a study of the tides, etc., he was able to prove how remarkably accurate Luke was in what he wrote." Lieutenant Edwin Smith of Canada was in the Mediterranean waters in 1918-1919 in command of a ship on special service. He also had opportunity to test out Luke's accuracy and make a study of shipping in Paul's day. What were these ancient ships like? Lieutenant Smith makes this answer:

In general outline they did not differ so much from sailing ships of fifty years ago, especially in their under-water parts, with the exception that the bow and stem were very much alike . . . Perhaps the greatest difference between these ancient ships and all classes of modern ships, is in the steering arrangements. The ancient ships were not steered as those in modern times, by a single rudder hinged to the stem post, but by two great oars or paddles, one on each side of the stem; hence the mention of them in the plural number by St. Luke ([Acts 27:40](#)). They were operated through two hawse holes, one on either side, which were used also for the cables when the ships were anchored by the stern.

James speaks of only one rudder on a ship ([Jas. 3:4](#), A. R. V.), but this is because the pilot would only make use of one of the two rudders at a time.

In [Acts 27:17](#), A. R. V. ([Acts 27:17](#)), Luke tells us that the sailors lowered the sail in the storm, and in [verse 40](#) ([Acts 27:40](#)) he informs us that they hoisted up the foresail. This latter was a small sail which the seamen were in the habit of substituting for the mainsail in storms. [Verse 17](#) ([Acts 27:17](#)) also says: "They used helps, undergirding the ship." When it became necessary, chains or cables were placed around the hull at right angles to the length of the ship, and then pulled tight. The English navy calls this process "frapping."

Luke gives us the names of the officers on board Paul's ship ([Acts 27:11](#)). The Roman centurion was in chief command of the ship. Then came the pilot and captain (cf. Williams' Tr.).

Ancient ships as now had their own individual ensign. Thus the ship on which Paul took the final stage of his journey to Rome was called Castor and Pollux which means, "The Twin Brothers" (cf. [Acts 28:11](#), Williams). Ancient ships were personified, and thus grew the custom of painting an eye on each side of the ship's bow. This custom has persisted down to modern times among Mediterranean ships. Luke evidently was referring to this custom when he wrote: "When the ship was caught and could not face the wind, we gave way to it" ([Acts 27:15](#), A. R. V.). Literally translated it would be, "could not look the wind in the face."

CHAPTER 28

PALESTINE WATER SUPPLY

Wells, Springs, Or Fountains

WELLS AND THEIR LOCATION. In many cases wells have been depended upon for water in Palestinian towns through the years. Often the well is located outside the city walls, but sometimes the people are fortunate to have the well inside their town. Archaeologists have discovered at least two ancient cities in addition to Jerusalem, that brought water inside their city through a tunnel. The city of Gezer had such a tunnel that led from within the city to a water supply beneath. And the Canaanites at Megiddo, rather than go outside their city for water, sunk a shaft straight down to the level of the spring, and then dug a tunnel horizontally until they reached it.

Securing Water For Home Use

We have already seen (Chapter 8, pp. 88-90) that it is the duty of the women to go to the well to get the family supply of water. This is carried by them in pitchers of earthenware either upon their shoulder or head. If larger supplies of water are needed, then the men carry such in sheepskin or goatskin "bottles."

Famous Wells And Fountains Of Scripture

Wells were dug by the early *patriarchs* in various places in the land of Canaan. The town of Beersheba was named after an event that happened at the time Isaac's servants dug a well there. The name means "The Well of the Oath," commemorating the covenant made between Isaac and Abimelech, which followed soon after the trouble over possession of wells at Gerar ([Genesis 26](#)).

Jacob's well at Sychar was made famous by the incident of Jesus talking with the woman of Samaria there. There is nothing left at these wells that may be used for drawing water from a depth. Each woman who comes for water brings with her, in addition to the pitcher in which to carry the water, a hard leather portable bucket with a rope, in order to let it down to the level of the water. The Samaritan woman had brought all this with her, but Jesus had no such equipment with him. Hence she said to him, after he had asked her for a drink: "You have no bucket, sir, and the well is deep" ([John 4:11](#), Twentieth Century N. T.). In response to his request she drew from the well and gave him a drink.

It was water from a *Bethlehem well* for which David in the wilderness longed. To appreciate his desire, one needs to know what thirst in the wilderness means, and also be acquainted with the cool water of the Bethlehem wells and cisterns. In the hillsides around Bethlehem are terraced vineyards, and most of these have a rock-hewn cistern located in them, which collects rain water in the winter months and preserves this water in a delightfully cool condition in the hot summer months. The men of Bethlehem boast of their cool water. One man was given a drink, but expressed a longing for water out of his father's vineyard, saying that it was so cold that he couldn't drink an entire glassful without taking it away from his lips at least three times. Thus David, stationed at the cave of Adullam, and living in the parched wilderness, and weary from fighting, said: "Oh that one would give me drink of the water of the well of Bethlehem, which is by the gate" ([2Sam. 23:15](#)). When three of his men risked their lives in fighting Philistines in order to secure for him some of this cool Bethlehem water, David "poured it out unto the Lord" ([2Sam. 23:16](#)). This was according to the ancient custom of a libation offering, or the pouring on the ground as an act of worship, wine, or oil, or milk, or honey, or water. Sometimes these drink offerings were poured by the Hebrews on the animal sacrificed to the Lord. In doing what he did, David was giving to the Lord the drink of water that had cost so much for the men to secure for him.

Throughout the centuries the town of *Nazareth* has had but one main source for its water supply, a well or fountain that is located at the northwest extremity of the town. We may be fairly certain that Mary came here with her pitcher to draw water for her household use, and that here the boy Jesus often quenched his thirst.

One of the most important springs in Palestine is the one at *Jericho*. Its water comes from the Judean wilderness mountains located behind the town. This spring contributes to a pool of water adjoining the excavated mound of old Jericho, and this is now called "Elisha's Fountain." It is believed to be the waters healed by the prophet long ago ([2Kings 2:21](#)). Although the level of this water gets quite low in the hot weather, it seldom dries up entirely, and is a source of water for men, animals, and the oasis of banana, fig, and date palms of the vicinity.

Cisterns



Oriental Well or Cistern

Picture:

Oriental Well or Cistern

The word "well" to the average native of Palestine has meant "spring" or "fountain," but in the Bible account it often means "cistern." Actually the cistern has been a more common source of Palestine's water supply than has the well. To drink water out of the family cistern was the proverbial wish of every Jew, and such was the promise that King Sennacherib of Assyria used to try and tempt the Jews into making peace with him. He said to them: "Make an agreement with me by a present, and come out to me, and then eat ye every man of his own vine, and every one of his fig tree, and drink ye every one the waters of his cistern" ([2Kings 18:31](#); cf. [Isa. 36:16](#)). These family cisterns were often dug in the open courtyard of houses as was the case of "the man which had a well [cistern] in his court." At the time of year referred to this cistern was dry and so two men could easily be hidden therein ([2Sam. 17:18-19](#)). During the rainy season the rain water is conducted from the house roofs to these cisterns by means of troughs. Usually the water is drawn up by means of a rope that runs over a wheel, and a bucket made of animal skins is fastened to the rope. Jeremiah used the picture of a cistern that leaked water, to illustrate one of his sermons: "For my people have committed two evils"; the prophet said of the Lord, "They have forsaken me the fountain of living waters, and hewed them out cisterns, broken cisterns, that can hold no water" ([Jer. 2:13](#)).

The Source Of Jerusalem's Water

Pools Of Water In And Around The City

Throughout most of its history, the Holy City has depended largely upon private cisterns which its inhabitants have maintained to catch rain water. The city itself has had through the years no living fountain or spring within its walls. The spring of Gihon now called "The Virgin's Fountain," is located in the Valley of Kidron just outside the old city of the Jebusites or the City of David. King Hezekiah constructed a conduit or tunnel from this spring through the rock underneath the city to a place in the Tyropean Valley, where a reservoir was constructed to receive the water ([2Kings 20:20](#)). This reservoir has gone by the name of *The Pool of Siloam*. This water project was undertaken mainly to give the city a water supply in time of siege. The pool has been an important source of water for Jerusalem through the centuries. Here the Arab women of the old city often come to wash their clothes, or their

vegetables, or their children. And farther in the pool or mouth of the tunnel, they get their pitchers filled with the family supply of water. And at this pool also an occasional shepherd will come to wash his sheep.

Other pools located in and around the city that have supplied water include the *Pool of Hezekiah*, located inside the walls and fed with water through an underground conduit from the Pool of Mamilla. This latter pool lies 2000 feet to the west of Jaffa Gate outside the walls, and is in the Valley of Hinnom and receives drainage water coming down that valley. The *Pool of the Sultan* lies just outside the Southwestern corner of the wall in this same valley. The *Pool of Bethesda* is to be found just inside the Eastern wall, between St. Stephen's Gate and the Northern, wall of the temple enclosure. It was here that many sick ones bathed in Christ's time, believing its waters had healing properties. It was here Christ healed the impotent man ([John 5](#)).

Solomon's Pools And The Temple Area Reservoir

Two miles south of Bethlehem there are three reservoirs of water that have for centuries been called Solomon's Pools, because it is generally believed that he originally constructed them. Josephus indicated that it was probably Pontius Pilate who rebuilt and enlarged them. Water from these pools was brought to Jerusalem by means of a rock aqueduct and emptied into a great reservoir located under the temple area. Even today water from this source is brought up to the surface at a point between the Dome of the Rock and the Mosque el-Aksa, by an animal skin bucket attached to a rope and running over a wheel. Water carriers using goatskin "bottles" come here to get their water and carry it to many parts of the old city of Jerusalem .

During six months of the year, when there is no rain, water becomes scarce in many parts of Palestine, especially during the latter part of that season when one after another cistern has dried up, and permanent wells and ever-flowing sources must be depended upon for water. In such times the water carrier will go to a well, or reservoir, and then peddle his supply of water to those who need it. He may go down the streets of the city, or he may go into the marketplace. He will call out: "Ho, ye thirsty ones, come ye and drink." There have been times when a philanthropic person has paid the water carrier for all his supply of water and thus let him offer it free of charge to those who need it. Then he will call forth: "Ho, ye thirsty ones, come and drink today for nothing, for nothing!" Such words remind us of the prophetic invitation of Isaiah: "Ho, every one that thirsteth, come ye to the waters, and he that hath no money; come ye, buy . . . without money and without price" ([Isa. 55:1](#)).

Water For Modern Jerusalem

The portion of Palestine now included in the new nation of Israel has undergone a marvelous transformation in regard to the supply of water for irrigation purposes as well as for household use. Primitive customs are fast disappearing and modern customs are taking their place in the Jewish sections of the land. The Jewish part of Jerusalem has had a new supply of water coming thirty miles from ancient Antipatris or Ras el Ein, located in the Plain of Sharon. Water coming from copious springs located there is pumped by relay pumping stations through a large pipeline up to the crest of the hills where the Holy City stands. The Jerusalem under the control of Israel has become very much westernized, with water piped to the houses. But in much of the ancient or Arab portion of Jerusalem, one still sees women carrying water pitchers on their head or shoulder, and men carrying goatskin "bottles" of water, very much like it was done by the ancient Hebrews. And numerous cisterns still conserve rain water.

CHAPTER 29

RAIDS AND BLOOD AVENGING

Raids

PRACTICE AMONG ARAB DESERT TRIBES. When there is no strong ruler among the desert tribes of Arabs, who is able to keep peace between the tribes, then some of the tribes may revert to the old pastime of raiding another tribe. They will select a tribe that is well supplied with cattle and goods, and will send out scouts to familiarize themselves with the tribe they wish to raid. They will organize their forces and plan to arrive there on a set night and usually in the dark of the moon. They will come up in stealth. One of the men or boys will approach the tents in order to attract the attention of the dogs, and then this young man will run in a different direction in order to attract the dogs away from the tents. When the place is sufficiently cleared of the dogs, then the men will rush in from different directions, untie the camels, drive off the sheep and cattle, and steal all the valuable property they can, to take home to their tents and give to their sheik. This will be done amid the screaming of the women. The men who oppose them are overcome. But the raiders are careful not to harm the women, and they are careful not to shed blood. The Mohammedan religion permits raids, but does not allow lives to be lost in the process. If blood is shed then a "blood feud" is started, and this is a very serious matter, for they often run for generations. The tribe will endeavor to kill as many as were killed in the raid.

Practice In Old Testament Days

In the book of Judges, bands of desert people called "the Children of the East," were a constant menace to the Israelites. When these pastoral encampments neared the borders of agriculture, a raid would be planned against the harvest of Israel, or any of their flocks, herds, or other valuable goods. Scripture says of these people: "And so it was, when Israel had sown, that . . . the children of the east, even they came up against them; and they encamped against them, and destroyed the increase of the earth . . . and left no sustenance for Israel, neither sheep, nor ox, nor ass" ([Judges 6:3, 4](#)). The tent-dwelling robbers were known in the days of Job, for he says of them: "The tents of robbers prosper" ([Job 12:6](#), A. R. V.). The prophet Obadiah tells of robbers stealing by night. "If thieves came to thee, if robbers by night . . . would they not have stolen till they had enough?" ([Obadiah 1:5](#)). These robbers of ancient times are in many ways similar to the Arab raiders of modern times. The latter illustrate for us methods used by the former.

Blood Avenging

Ancient Character Of This Custom

The shedding of blood during a raid starts a blood feud which may continue for many years. The basis for this feud is a custom or law that is common among many Semitic people. The unit of society among these peoples is the tribe or clan. The members of any one tribe have a responsibility to punish anybody who wrongs a member of their clan. The blood of a murdered member of the tribe "crieth . . . from the ground" ([Gen. 4:10](#)), and the nearest male relative is especially duty bound to avenge the murder. In olden times, instead of the state executing a murderer, it became the duty of the kinsman to avenge the death of the relative. The law of Moses recognized this right of the kinsman, but it did protect one who killed a person by accident and not by purpose, and so provided the cities of refuge, where such a man might flee and receive justice. "These six cities shall be a refuge, both for the children of Israel, and for the stranger, and for the sojourner among them: that every one that killeth any person unawares may flee thither" ([Num. 35:15](#)). But these cities of refuge were no protection for a real murderer. He was turned over to the kinsman for vengeance. "The revenger of blood [i.e., the kinsman] himself shall slay the murderer: when he meeteth him, he shall slay him" ([Num. 35:19](#)).

Application Of The Principle To Bible Times

The Bedouin tribes of Arabs today govern themselves according to the old customs and laws. The whole tribe shares with the kinsman in the responsibility to avenge the shedding of blood. These old regulations need to be known in order to have an understanding of what happened in the twenty-first chapter of Second Samuel. A famine came to the land of David three successive years, and when David inquired of the Lord for the cause of it, "The Lord answered, It is for Saul, and for his bloody house, because he slew the Gibeonites" ([2Sam. 21:1](#)). King Saul had broken the covenant Israel had made with the Gibeonites, and had cruelly murdered many of these people. As a tribe of people this band of men felt duty bound to avenge the crime of Saul, but had no opportunity to do so. According to the law of the kinsman, commonly accepted among them, since the guilty man was dead, certain of his descendants should pay the penalty for the crime. Thus the death of seven male descendants of Saul atoned for Saul's sin, as far as this tribe was concerned.

CHAPTER 30

SLAVERY IN BIBLE TIMES

Slavery Under The Law Of Moses

SLAVERY AMONG THE HEBREWS THEMSELVES. Hebrews could be "hired servants" of their brethren, but they were not allowed to be "bondservants" ([Lev. 25:39, 40](#)). Concerning the one thus hired out as a servant, the Lord said: "Thou shalt not rule over him with rigor; but shalt fear thy God" ([Lev. 25:43](#)). Such slavery was ordinarily brought about by poverty, i.e., because of debts a man could not meet ([Lev. 25:39](#)); or by theft, i.e., because of restitution a man could not pay ([Exod. 22:2, 3](#)). Such a Hebrew slave could be redeemed by relatives at any time ([Lev. 25:48, 49](#)). If not redeemed, he was set free after six years of service and was sent away with presents of cattle and fruit ([Deut. 15:12-14](#)). A Hebrew slave could choose out of love for his master not to be free in the seventh year, and thus become a lifelong servant of his master. The following custom was observed in such a case: "Then thou shalt take an aul, and thrust it through his ear unto the door, and he shall be thy servant for ever" ([Deut. 15:17](#)).

Slavery With Hebrew Masters And Foreign Slaves

Most of these slaves were those who were captured in wartime. See ([Num. 31:26](#); [Deut. 21:10](#)). Some were bought in foreign slave markets ([Lev. 25:44](#)). And foreigners living in the land could become slaves for the same reasons Hebrews could, through poverty or theft. Such slaves were treated as the property of their masters ([Lev. 25:45](#)). There are indications, however, that some of them were freed under certain conditions, and some writers are of the opinion that they were freed under the law of Jubilee.

Protection Of The Slaves

The Mosaic Code contains various regulations that protect the rights and privileges of slaves. For instance, a fugitive slave law was quite favorable to the slave and was designed to protect him from oppression ([Deut. 23:15, 16](#)). All the religious privileges enjoyed by free Israelites were assured to their slaves, including the rest of the Sabbath ([Exod. 20:10](#)), the right to attend the national festivals ([Deut. 16:10, 11](#)), and the right to attend the gathering of the people to hear the reading of the law ([Deut. 31:10-13](#)).

Why The Mosaic Law Permitted Slavery Instead Of Abolishing It

When the laws were given at Mt. Sinai, slavery was universal among the nations of the world. It was not practical to do away with it all at once. Rather, laws were given to prevent the worst abuses and evils of it from being present among the Jews. W. M. Taylor has this to say in regard to the relation of the law to slavery, divorce, etc.

It is noticeable, however, that wherever things in themselves questionable are tolerated, because they were too deeply seated to be removed by an immediate prohibition, the legislation regarding them is of such a character as to mitigate the evils, and prepare the way for their ultimate repression's.

The wisdom of such a policy is seen in the actual influence of the Mosaic legislation upon slavery among the Jews. Due to this influence, slavery among the Jews themselves had virtually disappeared by the time of Christ and His disciples.

Slavery Under Israel's Enemies

Many of the Jews experienced slavery under foreign rule in the time of the captivities. They became captives of war to the Phoenicians who sold them to the Greeks ([Joel 3:4-6](#)). The Philistines captured them and then delivered them up to Edom ([Amos 1:6](#)). When the Assyrians conquered Samaria, many of the Jews were taken away to the land of Assyria to serve as slaves of that people.

([2Kings 17:6](#)). When Jerusalem was destroyed, the Babylonians carried away to Babylon many Hebrews to become their slaves in this foreign capital ([2Chron. 36:20](#)). At a later date, the Syrian merchants came into camp in order to secure Jewish slaves ([1 Maccabees 3:41](#) in Apocrypha). And in the days of Rome's supremacy many Jews served as slaves of the empire. But slavery under Gentile dominion was indeed altogether different from slavery under the Mosaic Law. Masters were for the most part cruel and slaves were usually oppressed greatly.

Slavery In The Roman Empire

Character And Extent Of Slavery

In the first century human life was indeed cheap, for it has been estimated that a half of the total population of the empire, or about sixty million people, were slaves. Some wealthy Romans possessed as many as twenty thousand slaves. Slave owners became very brutal, and the slaves themselves were without hope and many of them very corrupt. For the most part these slaves were those conquered in war. Some of those captured were more educated than their captors. Thus it came about that sometimes Greek slaves became schoolteachers for the family of their masters.

The Roman Law And The Slave

Under the Roman law the slave did not have the rights or protection such as he enjoyed under the Hebrew legislation. A master might have his slave crucified for almost any reason. Augustus Caesar had thirty thousand slaves crucified during his reign. A slave who stole might be branded by his master on the face with the letters C. F., representing the words "Cave furem," meaning, "Beware the thief." And in the case of a runaway slave, if he were caught, his master might brand him, give him more than customary labor, or could have him put to death if he so desired. The law did allow that he could be reinstated with mercy, through the intercession of a special friend of the master. The Apostle Paul was Philemon's friend who interceded on behalf of the runaway slave Onesimus. The Epistle to Philemon was Paul's plea to his friend on behalf of the converted slave. No doubt Philemon gave Onesimus his freedom after receiving Paul's letter.

Attitude Of The Apostles Toward Slavery In The Roman Empire

They did not attempt to do away with the terrible evil immediately. This would have been a hopeless task, and such an attempt would have been doubtless crushed by the iron hand of Rome. Rather, they were satisfied to give forth Christian principles, and so preach the gospel of liberation from sin, that the result would be to do away with human slavery through the conquering power of Christ. Paul's letter to Philemon has, no doubt, done more to overcome slavery than any other document ever written.

New Testament Use Of The Word Slave In Relation To Christ

In view of the way slaves were so often treated in the first century, it is remarkable that the Apostles again and again called themselves the slaves of Christ. Paul refers to himself thus ([Rom. 1:1](#) and [Phil. 1:1](#), Williams). James, Peter, and Jude do the same thing ([Jas. 1:1](#); [2Pet. 1:1](#); [Jude 1](#), Williams). To be the slave of Christ is to be God's freeman ([1Cor. 7:22](#)). Of course, some of those first century slaves were treated as friends to be trusted, and they really loved their masters and served them faithfully. This is the picture of all true believers in relation to Christ. Christ is our Owner, and we are His willing and loving slaves.

CHAPTER 31

GREEK ATHLETICS AND ROMAN GLADIATORIAL SHOWS

FOLLOWING THE VICTORIOUS ARMY of Alexander the Great, the games and gymnastic sports of the Greeks were introduced into Palestine, and a gymnasium was erected at Jerusalem. These athletic events delighted the Gentiles, but were repugnant to the pious Jews, because they were of a demoralizing character. Those who took part in these contests did so with naked bodies. Under the rule of the Maccabees these spectacles came to an end, but Herod the Great revived them, building a theater at Jerusalem, and similar ones in other places. The Romans carried on many of the Greek athletic customs, but came to give special prominence to their gladiatorial shows.

The Greek Olympic Games

Character Of The Olympic Games

Although the four principal Grecian games were the Isthmian, the Nemean, the Pythian, and the Olympian Games, the latter were by far the most celebrated. They were held every four years at Olympia in honor of the god Zeus. The event began with special presentation of offerings to various gods and heroes. Following this there were four heats of short races to determine a winner; then longer races were held; and then came a contest of a five-fold nature including leaping, racing, quoits, spear-throwing, and wrestling; then there was chariot-racing, boxing, running in armor, and contests between heralds and trumpeters.

Preparation For The Olympian Games

Contestants were under very rigid rules, which began with a prescribed diet for their meals at home, and for thirty days before the events began they resided at one place where they were under constant supervision. They had to agree to refrain from dainties, to exercise their bodies regularly, and to obey all of the rules of the games when the events took place. The Apostle Paul referred to this self-discipline when he wrote to the Corinthians: "And every man that striveth in the games exerciseth self-control in all things" ([1Cor. 9:25](#), A. R. V.). And to young Timothy he said, "No contestant in the game is crowned unless he competes according to the rules" ([2Tim. 2:5](#), Williams).

Prizes For Winning In The Games

When an athletic event was completed, a herald proclaimed aloud the name of the victor and the city from which he came. He was presented with a palm branch by the judges, and the prizes were given out on the last day of the games. It came to be customary to give the winners a wreath made from the leaves of what was considered to be the sacred wild olive tree. Paul refers to the incorruptible nature of the Christian's reward-crown in contrast to the perishable character of the prize in the Greek games. "Now they do it to obtain a corruptible crown; but we an incorruptible" ([1Cor. 9:25](#)). Peter had the same thought in mind when he wrote: "Ye shall receive a crown of glory that fadeth not away" ([1Pet. 5:4](#)).

Allusions To Races In The Epistles

Paul compares himself to an Olympian racer when he writes: "I press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus" ([Phil. 3:14](#)). And as his valedictory, he declares: "I have run my race" ([2Tim. 4:7](#), Williams). The writer to the Hebrews sees the Christian's race as being run with endurance before a great crowd of spectators: "Therefore, as we have so vast a crowd of spectators in the grandstands, let us throw off every impediment and the sin that easily entangles our feet, and run with endurance the race for which we are entered" ([Heb. 12:1](#), Williams).

Allusions To Wrestling And Boxing In The Epistles

In writing about the Christian's contest with the powers of Satan, Paul likens it to a wrestling match, such as was part of the activity of a Greek Olympian festival. The contest was between two men each of whom tried to throw the other man, and when one succeeded in first throwing down,

and then holding down his opponent with his hand upon his neck, he was declared to be the winner. When Paul wrote to the Romans: "Strive together with me in your prayers" ([Rom. 15:30](#)), he was wanting them to put the same energy into their prayers as a wrestler would put into his efforts to win his contest. (Cf. Williams and Weymouth translations of this verse.) In writing to the Corinthians Paul clearly refers to boxing. He says: "So fight I, not as one that beateth the air: but I keep under my body, and bring it into subjection" ([1Cor. 9:26-27](#)). He is thinking of keeping his body under control lest if he fails to do so he be disqualified to be an effective Christian worker.

Allusions To Various Athletic Ideas In The New Testament

The Apostle Paul was fond of making use of athletics to illustrate truth. To the Philippians he spoke of "striving together for the faith of the gospel" ([Phil. 1:27](#)). The words striving together actually mean "acting as athletes in concert." In the language of modern athletics, he was thinking of the importance of "team spirit" in church work. And when Paul wanted to give a gentle rebuke to two women at Philippi who were not of the same mind, he also complimented them by referring to them as "those women which labored with me in the gospel" ([Phil. 4:3](#)). The reference here again is to athletics. "These women were spiritual athletes." He was saying that they had worked with him like young men labor together to win an athletic contest. When Jude urged his readers to "earnestly contend for the faith Which was once for all delivered unto the saints" ([Jude 3](#), A. R. V.), he was using "another athletic word."

The Roman Gladiator Shows

One of the chief forms of amusement among the Romans of the early Christian era was to condemn criminals, and especially Christians, to fight with lions, bears, elephants, or tigers in the amphitheaters of the empire, before huge crowds of spectators. The crowds would urge on the beast by throwing darts or by shouting in a mad spirit, and then watch the poor victim torn to pieces by the animal. Paul referred to this practice when he said, "If after the manner of men I have fought with beasts at Ephesus" ([1Cor. 15:32](#)). It is believed, however, that Paul was comparing his bitter experience at Ephesus ([Acts 19](#)), with such a contest in the amphitheater, because he was himself a Roman citizen, and the Romans would not allow a citizen to be subjected to a degradation such as fighting with beasts. The writer to the Hebrews compares the experiences of his hearers to what happened in the arena. "In consequence of the taunts and injuries heaped upon you, you became a public spectacle" ([Heb. 10:33](#), Twentieth Century N. T.).

The Romans had a custom in the arena to which Paul refers. Often they allowed the men who fought with beasts in the morning, to have armor and equipment with which to fight the animals. But as a last event that took place about noon, men who were naked and without any armor or defense were brought in, and the animals were turned loose upon them. Thus in telling of the sufferings of apostles, Paul said: "For I think that God hath set forth us the apostles last, as it were appointed to death: for we are made a spectacle unto the world, and to angels, and to men" ([1Cor. 4:9](#)).